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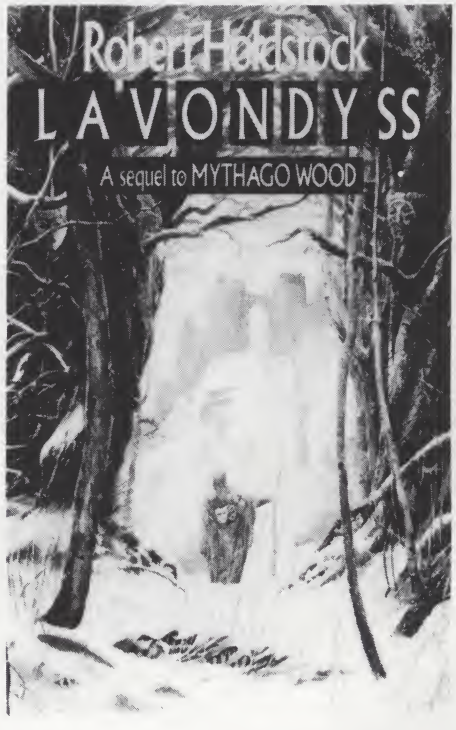

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**Submissions**: unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. *We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage.* No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Story submissions should be sent to *any one* of the following addresses:

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# interzone

## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

**No 26** **November/December 1988**

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# Interface

## David Pringle

This *Interzone*, like the last, will have much wider circulation than the previous 24 issues. With number 25 in August our print-run leapt by 10,000 copies, and that figure will be sustained for at least the next few issues. Thanks to our new distributors, Diamond-Europress and Central Books, the magazine should have become available for the first time in a wide range of general bookshops and newsagents (but by no means all – one major chain has agreed to take a few thousand copies; others have yet to follow suit). It's too early to say how this greater availability will translate into sales; but at least we're out there, we're no longer invisible.

However, there is another form of invisibility from which *Interzone* still suffers, and I'd like to have a brief grumble about it here. I refer to the kind of invisibility which prevents the arbiters of literary taste from even noticing that we exist. This is a "genre" magazine, and therefore a denizen of the red-light district of literature (as I think John Clute once put it). We believe in the value of those categories which are labelled science fiction and fantasy, and we aim to be popular. These attitudes put us beyond the pale as far as the High Literary Culture of Britain is concerned. We may have published some exceptionally fine writers, Booker Prize nominees among them, but we are, after all, a mere "sci-fi" magazine and hence automatically unworthy of mention in polite society.

A small example: **Christopher Burns**'s short-story collection, *About the Body*, was recently published by Secker & Warburg. It's a handsome volume of 14 tales (some of them sf, although sf is nowhere mentioned on the jacket copy) and it has clearly been packaged in such a way as to appeal to the literary editors of the serious press. In the short profile of Burns on the back flap, the publishers state: "His stories have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *London Magazine* and the *Critical Quarterly*." According to the detailed acknowledgements inside, the *LRB* published two of these stories; the *London Magazine* also published two; and *Critical Quarterly* just one. As it happens, *Interzone* published *four* – but *IZ* doesn't rate a mention on the jacket: I suppose it just doesn't fit with the tone of high seriousness the publicists are striving for.

It's a trivial matter in itself, but all too symptomatic. Please don't think I'm blaming Christopher Burns for this – he's an excellent writer, and I hope his book receives glowing reviews all over the place. Nor am I particularly aggrieved at Secker & Warburg: they're trying to sell a worthy product by the time-honoured methods. No, it's the snobbishness of British culture which exasperates me, the enduring nature of all its in-built assumptions about rank and place. Despite the proselytizing over the years of Kingsley Amis and Edmund Crispin and Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard and Doris Lessing (to name but a few of the great and the good) science fiction just won't do, old chap.

## *IZ* POLL RESULTS

It's that time of year again. Here are the results of our annual popularity poll. We sent questionnaires to all those subscribers who lapsed with issue 24, or who were about to lapse with issue 25, and 268 of them took the trouble to respond (a larger sample than usual). As in past years, we have subtracted negative mentions from positive ones to arrive at the scores shown below. The votes refer to the contents of issues 21-24 inclusive:

*Fiction:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1) | "The Giving Plague" by David Brin | 85 |
| 2) | "The Time-Lapsed Man" by Eric Brown | 62 |
| 3) | "The Only One" by David S. Garnett | 61 |
| 4) | "Krash-Bangg Joe..." by Eric Brown | 55 |
| 5) | "Scatter My Ashes" by Greg Egan | 41 |
| 6) | "Famous Monsters" by Kim Newman | 39 |
| 7) | "The Girl Who Died..." by Eric Brown | 38 |
| 8) | "Karl and the Ogre" by Paul J. McAuley | 32 |
| 9) | "The Growth of... Usher" by Brian Stableford | 30 |
| 10) | "Memories of the Body" by Lisa Tuttle | 26 |
| 11=) | "Something for Nothing" by S.M. Baxter | 25 |
| | "Artefacts" by Christopher Evans | 25 |
| 13=) | "Salvage" by Julio Buck Abrera | 24 |
| | "Lux in Tenebris" by Phillip Mann | 24 |
| 15=) | "Heartland" by Karen Joy Fowler | 18 |
| | "Love Sickness, Part 2" by Geoff Ryman | 18 |
| 17) | "The Philosophical Stone" by Ken Wisman | 16 |
| 18) | "Among the Wounded" by Christopher Burns | 8 |
| 19) | "Dop*legan*er" by Garry Kilworth | 6 |
| 20) | "The Boys" by Charles Stross | 3 |
| 21) | "Layers of Meaning" by Brian Stableford | –5 |
| 22) | "Animator" by Alex Stewart | –7 |
| 23) | "The Decline of Sunshine" by Cherry Wilder | –31 |

*Artists:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1) | SMS | 62 |
| 2) | Pete Lyon | 46 |
| 3) | Ian Miller | 38 |
| 4) | Russ Tudor | 36 |
| 5) | Duncan Fegredo | 35 |
| 6) | Barbara Hills | 24 |
| 7) | David Hardy | 20 |
| 8) | Ferret | 13 |
| 9) | Paul Rickwood | 2 |
| 10) | Tina Horner | –5 |
| 11) | Emily English | –22 |

As before, I hope that people do not take this annual beauty contest too seriously. This year's winning story *and* the least popular story are included in our third anthology (just out from Simon & Schuster): we liked 'em both. Some of our contributors – **Charles Stross**, for example, and **Tina Horner** among the artists – obtain low scores because a large positive vote for each was cancelled by a nearly equal negative vote. So it goes.

## ANOTHER HUGO NOMINATION

The results of this year's **Hugo Awards** (decided by the members of the World Science Fiction Convention) will have been announced by the time this issue is printed. We'll report them next time around. I'm pleased to note that *Interzone* has been nominated for a Hugo in the "Best Semi-Prozine" category for the third year running. The four competitors on the shortlist are all American magazines: *Aboriginal SF*, *Locus*, *SF Chronicle* and *Thrust*.

Another set of awards: the Society of Strip Illustrators (UK) has inaugurated the annual **Mekon Awards** for "excellence in the field of comics illustration and script-writing." The first set of winners, announced 16th July 1988, were: Best British-Produced Work: *Violent Cases* by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean; Best Foreign-Produced Work: *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons; Best Artist: Dave Gibbons; Best Writer: Alan Moore; Most Promising Newcomer: Dave McKean; Frank Bellamy Award for Outstanding Achievement: the late Ron Embleton. Few surprises there.

## MORE STRUGGLING MAGAZINES

The remarkable **Science Fiction Eye**, a newish American semi-professional magazine which I first mentioned in *IZ* 22, continues to be published – alas, all too infrequently. The third issue, which is a ridiculous bedsheet size (it "appealed to me in a perverse fashion," explains co-editor/designer Dan Steffan), was dated March 1988, though I didn't receive my copy until July. Number four should be out by the time you read this, and it should have reverted to a more manageable format. Issue three has a lengthy interview with **Samuel R. Delany**, stories by **Ian Watson**, **John Shirley** and others, and a delightful essay on John Updike by old "Vincent Omniaveritas" himself, **Bruce Sterling**. Copies of this and earlier issues are available in Britain from The Unlimited Dream Company, c/o The Book Inn, 17 Charing Cross Rd., London WC2H 0EP, at £3 each postage included. Definitely recommended.

**Concluded on p.66**

# Bob Shaw
## Dark Night in Toyland

"Don't let it happen today," Kirkham prayed.

And then that other side of him, that intruder whose caustic, sneering voice had been growing more and more insistent for the past month, cut in with: *Yeah, it's bad enough for a kid to die of cancer at any time – but if it happens on Christmas Day it makes him feel rotten.*

Kirkham jumped to his feet and strode violently about the study, ashamed and afraid of the voice even though he was sufficiently Manicahaean in outlook to understand why he heard it. The oak-panelled room had once seems so right for a small-town Methodist minister whose mission was the preservation of religious belief in the hostile climate of the 21st century. Now it seemed dark and claustrophobic. He went to the window and pulled aside the green velvet drapes. It was ocean-black outside – six o'clock on a Christmas morning. No different to six o'clock on any other morning in winter.

The voice again: *Here it is, Christmas – and us out here chasing a star.*

Kirkham gnawed the back of his hand and went into the kitchen to brew coffee. Dora was there in her powder-blue dressing gown, making herself busy with cups and spoons. Straight-backed. Brave woman, their friends and neighbours must have been saying, but only Kirkham knew the extent to which she had been defeated by Timmy's illness.

One night when he had talked to her about faith she had said, with a kind of sad contempt, "Do you have faith that two and two make four? Of course not, John. Because you *know* that two and two make four." It had been the first and only time she had spoken to him in that manner, but he had a disturbing conviction she had been making a personal statement about life and death.

"I didn't hear you come down," he said. "Isn't it a little early for you?"

Dora shook her head. "I want this day to be as long as possible."

"It won't work, Dora." He knew at once what she was trying to do. Dostoevksy on the morning he was led out to be executed, resolving to magnify and subdivide every second so as to expand an hour into a lifetime.

"You have to let time go," he said. "With gladness. It's the only way to tackle eternity." He waited, aware he had sounded pompous, hoping she would challenge him and thus admit her need for his help. And thus establish, in his own mind, that he was able to help.

"Milk or cream?" she said.

"Milk." The sipped their coffees for a moment, separate, the bright clean geometries of the kitchen shimmering between them.

"What are we going to do next Christmas, John?" Dora's voice was matter-of-fact, as though discussing arrangements for a vacation. "When we're alone."

"We have to see what God has in store for us. Perhaps, by then, we'll understand."

"Perhaps we understand already. Perhaps the only thing we have to understand is that there is nothing for us to understand."

"Dora!" Kirkham felt a sombre excitement over the fact that his wife seemed on the brink of acknowledging her disbelief. He knew he would be unable to help her unless it was brought into the open. The words had to be said, the thoughts translated into mouth movements and air vibrations, even thought the eyes of God could see everywhere.

The voice: *Great eyesight, God has. I mean, how else could he sit at the centre of the galaxy and fire a cosmic ray across thousands of light years and hit a single cell in a little boy's spine? That's real sharpshooting in anybody's book. Especially the Good Book...*

Kirkham's attention on Dora's face wavered. Of all places, it had had to be the spine, where the living structures were too complex for successful reproduction by bioclay. The treatment had been applied, of course, using the most advanced compounds, and it had given Timmy a few extra months. For a time it had even seemed that a cure might be achieved (the breakthrough had to come someday) but then the boy had begun to lose the mobility of his left leg – first signs that the bioclay, which was displacing cancer cells as quickly as they were formed, was proving unequal to the task of recreating the original tissues.

"...be awake by this time," Dora was saying. "Let's go in."

Feeling that he had missed an important opportunity, Kirkham nodded and they went into Timmy's room. In the dim glow of the nightlight they could see that the boy was awake, but he had not touched the Christmas gifts which were stacked at his bedside. Kirkham learned, yet again, how the word heartbreak had originated. He hung back, afraid to trust his voice, while Dora went to the bed and kneeled beside it.

"It's Christmas morning," she coaxed. "Look at all the presents you have."



Illustrations by Russ Tudor

Timmy's dark eyes were steady on her face. "I know, Mum."

"Don't you want to open them?"

"Not now – I'm tired."

"Didn't you sleep well?"

"It's not that sort of tiredness." Timmy looked away from his mother, his small face dignified and lonely. Dora lowered her head.

*He knows*, Kirkham thought, and was galvanized into action. He hurried across the room and began opening the varicoloured packages.

"Look at this," he said cheerfully. "From Uncle Leo – an audiograph! Look at the way it turns my voice into colour patterns! And here's a self-moving chess set..." He went on opening parcels until the bed was covered with gifts and discarded wrappings.

"This is great, Dad." Timmy smiled. "I'll play with them later."

"All right, son." Kirkham decided to make one more attempt. "Isn't there anything you specially wanted?"

The boy glanced at his mother, suddenly alert, and Kirkham felt grateful. "There was one thing," Timmy said.

"What is it?"

"I told Mum last week, but I didn't think you'd let me have it."

Kirkham was hurt. "Why shouldn't...?"

"It's a Biodoh kit," Dora put in. "Timmy knows how you feel about that stuff."

"Oh! Well, you must admit it's not..."

"But I bought it for him anyway.

Kirkham began to protest, then he saw that – despite the encumbrance of his paralyzed legs – Timmy was struggling into an upright position in the bed, face filled with eagerness, and he knew it would be wrong to interfere at that moment. Dora went to a closet and brought a large flat box which had not been gift wrapped. Printed across it in capacitor inks which made the letters flash regularly, like neon signs, was the word "BIODOH". Kirkham felt a stirring of revulsion.

"Is it all right, Dad? Can I have it? You won't be sorry." Timmy was almost out of the bed. His pyjama jacket had crumpled up, exposing the edge of the therapeutic plastron the surgeons had attached to his back.

Kirkham made himself smile. "Of course, it's all right."

"Thanks, John." Dora's eyes signalled her gratitude as she made Timmy comfortable against his pillows and moved the other presents to a table.

Kirkham nodded. He went to a window, drew back the curtains and looked out. The panes were still enamelled with night's blackness, reflecting the scene within the bedroom. A child in a warmly lit cot, his mother kneeling by his side. The associations with the first Christmas, which might have comforted Kirkham earlier, seemed blasphemous in the presence of Dora's gift. He wanted to leave the room, to find peace to think, but there was a risk of spoiling his son's unexpected happiness. He returned to the bedside and watched Timmy explore the compartments and trays of the Biodoh box.

There was the pink dough which represented surface flesh; reddish slivers which would serve as muscles; coiled blue and yellow strands for nerves; plastic celery stalks for major bones;

interlocking white beads for vertebrae. Small eyes arranged in neat watchful pairs. Snap-on nylon hooks for muscle inserts, the silver plugs of nerve connectors. And – most hideous of all to Kirkham's eyes – the grey putty, debased commercial relative of the bioclay which was at work in Timmy's spine, which could be fashioned into ganglia. Primitive little brains. The boy's fingers fluttered over the box, briefly alighting on one treasure and then another.

Kirkham looked at the discarded lid on the floor. "BIODOH helps your child understand the Miracle of Life!" *The fools*, he thought, *don't they know that if you understand a miracle it ceases to be a miracle?*

Timmy leafed through the glossy instruction manual. "What should I make first, Mum?"

"What does it suggest?"

"Let me see...a giant caterpillar! Simple invertebrate...blind...Shall I try it? Right now?

"There's no time like the present," Dora said. "Come on – I'll help."

They put their heads together and – working intently, with frequent consultations of the manual – began to build an eight-inch caterpillar. A muscle strip of suitable length was chosen first. Load-spreaders, like miniature umbrellas, were attached to each extremity. A blue nerve cord was added, was cut in two at the centre of its length and silver nerve connectors were fitted to the severed ends.

Pale green surface flesh was taken from the appropriate compartment and formed in the shape of a hot-dog roll which had a longitudinal slit. The muscle, complete with nerve, was then laid in the slit and the load-spreaders were firmly pressed into the green flesh at each end.

Finally, Timmy took a pellet of the grey putty, pressed it against his wrist and determinedly opened and shut his hand in a steady rhythm for about a minute, to imprint the nerve impulse pattern in the receptive material.

"This is it," he said breathlessly. "Do you think it will work, Mum?"

"I think so. You did everything exactly right."

Timmy looked up at his father, seeking praise, but Kirkham could only stare at the lifeless green object on the workboard. It both horrified and fascinated him. Timmy dropped the grey pellet into the thing's interior and pressed the two silver nerve connectors into it.

On the instant, the caterpillar began to squirm.

Timmy gave a startled cry and dropped it. The pseudo-creature lay on the board, sideways, stretching and contracting. At each contraction its body opened obscenely and Kirkham saw the muscle swelling within.

*You lied to us, Christ*, he thought in his dread. *There is nothing special or sacred about life. Anybody can create it – therefore we have no souls.*

Timmy laughed delightedly. He picked up the caterpillar and sealed it along its length by pressing the sides of the wound together. The pale flesh melded. Timmy, working with uncanny certitude, fashioned little foot-like blobs along the creature's underside and set it down again. This time, stabilized and aided by its feet, the caterpillar crawled along the workboard, moving blindly, with the rhythm it had learned from Timmy's clenching fist. He looked into



his mother's face, triumphant, intoxicated.

"Good *boy*!" Dora exclaimed.

Timmy turned to his father. "Dad?"

"I...I've never..." Kirkham sought inspiration. "What name are you going to give it, son?"

"Name?" Timmy looked surprised. "I'm not going to *keep* it, Dad. I'll need the materials for other projects."

Kirkham's lips were numb. "What are you going to do with it?"

"Put it back into inventory, of course." Timmy lifted the dumbly working caterpillar, split it open in the middle with his thumbs and extracted the grey pellet. As soon as the nerve connectors were separated from the ganglion the pseudo-creature lapsed into stillness.

"That's all there is to it," Timmy commented.

Kirkham nodded, and left the room.

"I'm sorry to have to say this, John and Dora, but your boy has very little time left." Bart Rowntree stirred the tea Dora had made for him, his spoon creating irrelevant little ringing sounds in the quietness of the afternoon. His brow was creased with unprofessional sadness.

In contrast, Dora's face was carefully relaxed. "How much time?"

"Probably less than a week. I've just taken new tissue compatability readings, and the ratio is falling off very quickly. I...There's no point in my trying to paint a falsely optimistic picture."

"We wouldn't want you to do that, Bart," Kirkham said. "You're sure there'll be no pain?"

"Positive – the bioclay has built-in blocks. Timmy will simply go to sleep."

"That's something we can thank God for."

Dora's hand quivered abruptly, causing a rivulet of tea to slip down the side of her cup, and Kirkham knew she had wanted to challenge him. *You mean, something we can thank the makers of bioclay for.* He wished again that she would voice her thoughts and begin the process of spiritual catharsis. She had to be reassured that God's message had not changed and never would change.

*Come off it, John,* that other Kirkham snickered, *you don't take everything in the Bible as gospel.*

"Timmy was showing me his Biodoh kit," Rowntree said. "He seems to have made some quite advanced constructions."

"He has a talent for it." Dora was calm again. "He got on so well I had to buy him all the supplementary packs. Equilibrium units, voice simulators – that sort of thing."

"Really?"

"Yes, though I haven't seen everything he's been doing. He says he's going to give me a special surprise."

"It's incredible that he's been able to go so far in such a short time."

"He has the touch. It's a pity that..." Dora stopped speaking and shook her head, choking up.

"I don't think I like him having that stuff," Kirkham said. "There's something unwholesome about it and I think it takes too much out of him."

"Nonsense, John. If you want my professional opinion, you were very lucky to find something to occupy the boy's mind at this stage. Keeps him from brooding too much."

"That's the way I feel about it," Dora said, scoring a point over Kirkham.

Rowntree finished his tea and set the cup down. "You have to admit that Biodoh is a fascinating material. You know it's an unrefined form of surgical bioclay? Well, I've read that the impurities in it sometimes introduce random properties which lead to some very strange effects. In a way, it suggests that life itself is..."

"If you don't mind," Kirkham interrupted, getting to his feet, "I have to record this week's sermon."

Rowntree stood up too. "Of course, John – I'm due back at the clinic anyway."

Kirkham saw the doctor to the door and when he returned he found that Dora had gone upstairs, probably to Timmy's room. He hesitated for a moment, then went into his study and tried to work on his sermon, but suitable words refused to assemble in his mind. He knew what Rowntree had been about to say, and the other Kirkham kept repeating the same statement.

*Life itself,* the relentless voice gloated, *is only a chemical impurity.*

On the eighth day of January Timmy drifted into a coma, and from then on John Kirkham and Dora could do nothing but wait. The prolonged vigil had a dreamlike quality for Kirkham because he felt it was outside of normal time. His son had already left one world and was awaiting the completion of certain formalities before he could be admitted to the next.

Now that the ultimate trial had begun Kirkham found himself enduring better than he had feared. He slept quite a lot, always for short periods, and occasionally awoke with the conviction that he had heard sounds of movement from Timmy's room. But each time he opened the door and looked in, the boy was lying perfectly still. Pea-sized lights on the diagnostic panel at the head of the bed glowed steadily in fixed patterns, indicating that there had been no abrupt changes in Timmy's condition.

The only hint of activity came from the light-pulsing inks on the lids of the Biodoh boxes which, at Dora's insistence, were stacked by the bed. Their presence was still an affront to Kirkham, but during the night hours – while Dora and Timmy slept – he had confronted and overcome his fears.

The reason he abhorred Biodoh was that it appeared to give men, women, *children* the ability to create life. That led logically and inescapably to the annihilation of God, which in turn meant that the personality known as Timmy Kirkham was about to be snuffed out of existence for ever. Only God – not the manufacturers of Biodoh kits – could promise life beyond the grave.

Kirkham had found a simple, if distasteful, solution to his problem.

His own giant caterpillar had not been nearly as good as Timmy's first effort, and that had made the task of dismantling it less harrowing than he had expected. The silver plugs came easily out of the grey nodule and all movement ceased. A purely mechanical operation. Nothing to get upset about.

His second project was a slightly larger caterpillar, with a single eye, which would crawl towards a source

of light until the intensity of radiation passing through the iris reached a certain level, at which point the pseudo-creature would turn away. That, too, had been far less successful than Timmy's version – Dora had been right when she said the boy had a special talent – but it had crawled towards the light, hesitated, turned away, wandered, and then had been drawn to the brightness again in a manner which suggested complex motivations.

Kirkham's understanding of its operating principles, however, had enabled him to see that it was no different to a battery-powered toy car which would not run over the edge of a table. He realized, with a surge of gladness, how naïve he had been to equate a crude Biodoh construction with the unique complexity of a living being.

And, in the throbbing quietness of that night-time hour, while his son slipped nearer to death, it had been an emotionally neutral experience for Kirkham to scoop up the one-eyed caterpillar, open its belly, and return its various components to inventory.

Timmy died on the twelfth day of January, in the early hours of the morning.

John and Dora Kirkham stood beside the bed, hand in hand, and watched the lights on the diagnostic panel gently extinguish themselves. Mercifully, there was no other sign of the final event taking place. Timmy's small face shone with the peaceful lustre of a pearl. Kirkham could feel other lights fading away within himself – God had never intended the loss of a child to be entirely reconcilable – but one precious flame continued to burn steadily, sustaining him.

Dora gave a deep, quavering sigh and grew heavy in his arms. Kirkham led her from the room and into their own bedroom. Accepting his guidance, she lay down on the divan and allowed him to draw the duvet over her.

"I want you to stay here for a while," he said. "Try to get some rest. I'm going to call the clinic." He went to the door.

"John!" Dora's voice was weary, but firm.

"What is it?"

"I...I've been making things harder for you – but I was wrong. I was so wrong."

"I know you were, darling. As long as you realize it, nothing else matters."

She managed something like a smile. "It happened just as Timmy was leaving us. I just *knew* it couldn't be the end. I knew we would see him again."

Kirkham nodded, fulfilled. "You've got the message. Don't lose sight of it. Not ever!"

He turned out the light, closed the door and went towards the stair. From his right there came a scrappy little sound, like that of a small object falling over. He halted in the middle of a stride. The sound seemed to have come from Timmy's place of rest. Without giving himself time to think, Kirkham flung open the door of his son's bedroom. Timmy's body lay calm and unmoving in the dim light. Not knowing what he had expected, Kirkham advanced into the room.

*I should have covered his face*, he thought.

He approached the bed and drew the sheet upwards over the carved marble features. An instinct prompted him to pause and brush strands of hair away from the



child's dewy forehead. He had completed covering the body when he became aware of several crumbs of grey material clinging to his fingers. It looked like Biodoh cortical putty.

*It can't be*, Kirkham told himself. *You're only supposed to press it against your wrist. Timmy can't have been pressing it against his forehead – that's not in the instruction manual. You can't teach the stuff to think.*

There was a sound from behind him.

Kirkham whirled, his hands fluttering to his mouth as he saw the tiny upright figure emerge from the shadows of a corner. It walked towards him, arms outstretched, dragging its left leg as Timmy had once done. Its lips moved, and Kirkham thought he heard a faint distorted sound.

*Da...Da...Dad.*

He threw himself backwards and fell, overturning a chair. The figure came closer – naked and pink, moving with a ghastly crippled clumsiness – while he lay on the floor and watched. Its lips continued to move, and its eyes were fixed on him.

"John?" Dora's voice filtered out of another universe. "What's the matter, John?"

Kirkham tried to visualize what would happen if Dora came into the room – and suddenly he was competent, able to protect her from the fate which had already overtaken him.

"There's nothing wrong," he called out. "Stay where you are."

He rose on to his knees and allowed the miniature figure to approach him. *Suffer little children to come unto me*, his other self quoted, sneering. Kirkham closed his eyes and waited till the smooth cool body blundered against his legs. He lifted it and, using his thumbs, split it open at the thorax, exposing the nerve cords running up into the head. He hooked a fingernail around them and pulled them out, and the small object in his hands ceased to move.

*All I have to do is return the parts to inventory*, he thought, keeping his gaze averted from the figure in the bed, smiling his new kind of smile.

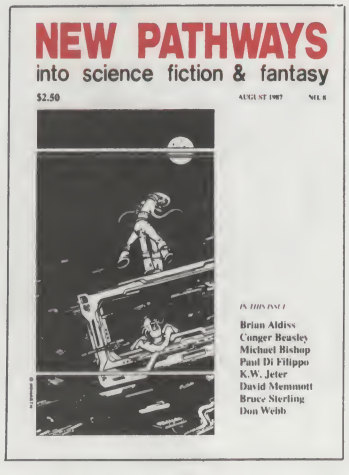
*A purely mechanical operation...*

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**Bob Shaw** was born in Northern Ireland in 1931. A sometime engineer and journalist, he has been a published sf writer since his first story appeared in *Nebula SF* in 1954 – though he didn't go full-time as an author until the mid-1970s. His many novels include *Nightwalk* (1967), *The Palace of Eternity* (1969), *Orbitsville* (1975) and the recent successes, *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986) and *The Wooden Spaceships* (1988). The above is his first story for *IZ*, and we're delighted to have him at last (there will be another piece from him next issue).

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# Terry Pratchett
# Wyrd Sisters

This may prove a little difficult. BUT...

Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and apprentice hag Magrat Garlick are the members of a three-witch coven ("When shall we three meet again?" "Well, I can't make it next Tuesday") who, on a night of murder and evil deeds, innocently come into possession of the young heir to the kingdom of Lancre and hide the baby by fostering it with a troupe of strolling players.

While the horribly evil usurping Duke, having disposed of the king, combs the kingdom for the lad (and also the lost crown, hidden in the props box) young Tomjon grows up in Ankh-Morpork and – partly because of the statutory three wishes given by his reluctant godmothers – becomes truly the greatest actor the world has ever known.

AND... The lad befriends Hwel the dwarf, a sort of pocket Shakespeare, who writes superb plays with titles like *Please Yourself* but suffers badly from too much inspiration.

MEANWHILE... Back in the Kingdom, and after a lot of plot diversions (including Magrat's embarrassing and hesitant love affair with the Fool, the Duke's suicidally-inclined jester) Duke Felmet hits on a ruse to seal his hold on the resentful kingdom: he will commission a play about the events of that dreadful night, but with the plot twisted so that *he* is the hero who killed off the wicked king, and history will be fooled.

In all innocence, Hwel writes the play and the players go to the palace to perform it.

In all innocence, Tomjon is about to go on stage in his rightful palace wearing his rightful crown to besmirch the memory of his dear dad – who, despite being a ghost, is in the audience with the three witches, who are the only people who can see him and who have come along to find out about this new sort of theatrical magic.

Oh, and Death is due to turn up to claim someone...

Oh, and there will also be an intervention by a thunderstorm which, throughout the earlier parts of the story, has been trying to get into show business.

LET ME PUT IT MORE SIMPLY... Imagine a careful selection of Scottish and Danish nobles and other important characters magically transported to the first-night performance of *M*b*th meets H*ml*t*, and you'll get the general idea.

The castle was full of people standing around in that polite, sheepish way affected by people who see each other all day and are now seeing each other again in unusual social circumstances, like an office party. The witches passed quite unremarked among them and found seats in the rows of benches in the main courtyard, set up before a hastily assembled stage.

Nanny Ogg waved her bag of walnuts at Granny. "Want one?" she said.

An alderman of Lancre shuffled past her and pointed politely to the seat on her left. "Is anyone sitting here?" he said.

"Yes," said Nanny.

The alderman looked distractedly at the rest of the benches, which were filling up fast, and then down at the clearly empty space in front of him. He hitched up his robes with a determined expression. "I think that since the play is commencing to start, your friend must find a seat elsewhere, when they arrive," he said, and sat down.

Within seconds his face went white. His teeth began to chatter. He clutched at his stomach and groaned.*

"I *told* you," said Nanny, as he lurched away. "What's the good of asking if you're not going to listen?" She leaned towards the empty seat. "Walnut?"

"No, thank you," said King Verence, waving a spectral hand. "They go right through me, you know."

"*Pray, gentles all, list to our tale...*"

"What's this?" hissed Granny. "Who's the fellow in the tights?"

"He's the Prologue," said Nanny. "You have to have him at the beginning so everyone knows what the play's about."

"Can't understand a word of it," muttered Granny. "What's a gentle, anyway?"

"Type of maggot," said Nanny. There was a chorus of '*shs*'.

"These walnuts are damn tough," said Nanny, spitting one out into her hand. "I'm going to have to take my shoe off to this one."

Granny subsided into unaccustomed, troubled silence, and tried to listen to the prologue. The theatre worried her. It had a magic of its own, one that didn't belong to her, one that wasn't in her control. It changed the world, and said things were otherwise than they were. And it was worse than that. It was magic that didn't belong to magical people. It was commanded by ordinary people, who didn't know the rules. They altered the world because it sounded better.

* The observant will realize that this was because the King was already seated there. It was not because the man had used the phrase "commence to start" in cold blood. But it ought to have been.

The Duke and Duchess were sitting on their thrones right in front of the stage. As Granny glared at them the Duke half turned, and she saw his smile.

I want the world the way it is, she thought. I want the past the way it was. The past used to be a lot better than it is now.

And the band struck up.

Hwel peered around a pillar and signalled to Wimsloe and Brattsley, who hobbled out into the glare of the torches.

Old Man (an Elder): "*What hath befell the land?*"

Old Woman (a Crone): "*T'is a terror –*"

The dwarf watched them for a few seconds from the wings, his lips moving soundlessly. Then he scuttled back to the guardroom where the rest of the cast were still in the last hasty stages of dressing. He uttered the stage managers' traditional scream of rage.

"C'mon," he ordered. "Soldiers of the king, at the double! And the Witches – *where are the blasted witches?*"

Three junior apprentices presented themselves.

"I've lost my wart!"

"The cauldron's all full of yuk!"

"There's something living in this wig!"

"Calm down, calm down," screamed Hwel. "It'll all be all right on the night!"

"This is the night, Hwel!"

Hwel snatched a handful of putty from the makeup table and slammed on a wart like an orange. The offending straw wig was rammed on its owner's head, livestock and all, and the cauldron was very briefly inspected and pronounced full of just the right sort of yuk, nothing wrong with yuk like that.

On stage a guard dropped his shield, bent down to pick it up, and dropped his spear. Hwel rolled his eyes and offered up a silent prayer to any gods that might be watching.

It was already going wrong. The earlier rehearsals had their little teething troubles, it was true, but Hwel had known one or two monumental horrors in his time and this one was shaping up to be the worst. The company was more jittery than a potful of lobsters. Out of the corner of his ear he heard the on-stage dialogue falter, and scurried to the wings.

"– avenge the terror of thy father's death –" he hissed, and hurried back to the trembling witches. He groaned. Divers alarums. This lot were supposed to be terrorizing a kingdom. He had about a minute before the cue.

"Right!" he said, pulling himself together. "Now, what are you? You're evil hags, right?"

"Yes, Hwel," they said meekly.

"Tell me what you are," he commanded.

"We're evil hags, Hwel."

"Louder!"

"We're Evil Hags!"

Hwel stalked the length of the quaking line, then turned abruptly on his heel. "And what are you going to do?"

The 2nd Witche scratched his crawling wig.

"We're going to curse people?" he ventured. "It's says in the script –"

"I-can't-HEAR-you!"

"We're going to curse people!" they chorused, springing to attention and staring straight ahead to avoid his gaze.

Hwel stumped back along the line. "What are you?"

"We're hags, Hwel!"

"What kind of hags?"

"We're black and midnight hags!" they yelled, getting into the spirit.

"What kind of black and midnight hags?"

"*Evil* black and midnight hags!"

"Are you scheming?"

"Yeah!"

"Are you secret?"

"*Yeah!*"

Hwel drew himself up to his full height, such as it was. "What-are-you?" he screamed.

"We're scheming, evil secret black and midnight hags!"

"Right!" He pointed a vibrating finger towards the stage and lowered his voice and, at that moment, a dramatic inspiration dived through the atmosphere and slammed into his creative node, causing him to say. "Now I want you to get out there and give 'em hell. Not for me. Not for the goddam captain." He shifted the butt of an imaginary cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and pushed back a non-existent tin helmet, and rasped. "But for Corporal Walkowski and his little dawg."

They stared at him in disbelief. He joined them. On cue, someone shook a sheet of tin and broke the spell.

Hwel rolled his eyes. He'd grown up in the mountains, where thunderstorms stalked from peak to peak on legs of lightning. He remembered thunderstorms that left mountains a different shape and flattened whole forests. Somehow, a sheet of tin wasn't the same, no matter how enthusiastically it was shaken.

Just once, he thought, just once. Let me get it right just once. He opened his eyes and glared at the witches.

"What are you hanging around here for?" he yelled. "Get out there and *curse* them!"

He watched them scamper onto the stage, and the Tomjon tapped him on the head.

"Hwel, there's no crown."

"Hmm?" said the dwarf, his mind wrestling with ways of building thunder-and-lightning machines.

"There's no crown, Hwel. I've got to wear a crown."

"Of course there's a crown. The big one with the red glass, very impressive, we used in that place with the big square –"

"I think we left it there."

There was another tinny roll of thunder but, even so, the part of Hwel that was living the play heard a faltering voice on stage. He darted to the wings. "– I have smother'd many a babe –" he hissed, and sprinted back.

"Well, just find another one, then," he said vaguely. "In the props box. You're the Evil King, you've got to have a crown. Get on with it, lad, you're on in a few minutes. Improvise."

Tomjon wandered back to the box. He'd grown up among crowns, big golden crowns made of wood and plaster, studded with finest glass. He'd cut his teeth on the hatbrims of Authority. But most of them had been left in the theatre at home. In rising desperation he pulled out collapsible daggers and skulls and vases, the strata of the years, and, right at the bottom, his fingers closed on something thin and crown-shaped.

It would be nice to say it tingled under his hand. Perhaps it did.

Granny was sitting as still as a statue, and almost as cold. The horror of realization was stealing over her.

"That's us," she said. "Round that silly cauldron. That's meant to be us, Gytha."

Nanny Ogg paused with a walnut halfway to her gums. She listened to the words. "I never shipwrecked anybody!" she said. "They just said they shipwreck people! I never did!"

Up in the tower Magrat elbowed the Fool in the ribs. "Green blusher," she said, staring at the 3rd Witche. "I don't look like that. I don't, do I?"

"Absolutely not," said the Fool.

"And that hair!"

The Fool peered through the crenellations like an over-eager gargoyle. "It looks like straw," he said. "Not very clean, either."

He hesitated, picking at the lichened stonework with his fingers. Before he'd left the city he'd asked Hwel for a few suitable words to say to a young lady, and he had been memorizing them on the way home. It was now or never.

"I'd like to know if I could compare you to a summer's day. Because you are – well, June 12th was quite nice, and... Oh, you've gone..."

King Verence gripped the edge of his seat; his fingers went through it. Tomjon had strutted onto the stage. "That's him, isn't it? That's my son?"

The uncracked walnut fell from Nanny Ogg's fingers and rolled onto the floor. She nodded.

Verence turned a haggard, transparent face towards her. "But what is he doing? What is he saying?"

Nanny shook her head. The king listened with his mouth open as Tomjon, lurching crabwise across the stage, launched into his major speech.

"I think he's meant to be you," said Nanny, distantly.

"But I never walked like that! Why's he got a hump on his back? What's happened to his leg?" He listened some more, and added, in horrified tones. "And I certainly never did *that!* Or that. Why is he saying I did that?"

The look he gave Nanny was full of pleading. She shrugged. The King reached up, lifted off his spectral crown, and examined it.

"And it's my crown he's wearing! Look, this is it! And he's saying I did all those –", he paused for a minute, to listen to the latest couplet, and added. "All right. Maybe I did *that*. So I set fire to a few cottages. But everyone does that. It's good for the building industry, anyway."

He put the ghostly crown back on his head. "Why's he saying all this about me?" he pleaded.

"It's art," said Nanny. "It wossname, holds a mirror up to life."

Granny Weatherwax turned slowly in her seat to look at the audience. They were staring at the performance, their faces rapt. The words washed over them in the breathless air. This was real. This was more real even than reality. This was history. It might not be true, but that had nothing to do with it.

Granny had never had much time for words. They were so insubstantial. Now she wished that she had found the time. Words were indeed insubstantial, as soft was water, and now they were rushing over the audience, eroding the levees of veracity, and carrying away the past.

That's us down there, she thought. Everyone knows who we really are, but the things down there are what they'll remember – three gibbering old baggages in pointy hats. All we've ever done, all we've ever been, won't exist any more.

She looked at the ghost of the King. Well, he'd been no worse than any other king. Oh, he might burn down the odd cottage every now and again, in a sort of absent-minded way, but only when he was really angry about something and he could give it up any time he liked. Where he wounded the world, he left the kind of wounds that healed.

Whoever wrote this Theatre knew about the uses of magic. Even I believe what's happening, and I know there's no truth in it. This is Art holding a Mirror up to Life. That's why everything is exactly the wrong way round. We've lost. There is nothing we can do against this without becoming exactly what we aren't.

Nanny Ogg gave her a violent nudge in the ribs. "Did you hear that?" she said. "One of 'em said we put babbies in the cauldron! They've done a slander on me! I'm not sitting here and have 'em say we put babbies in a cauldron!"

Granny grabbed her shawl as she tried to stand up. "Don't do anything!" she hissed. "It'll make things worse."

"'Ditch-delivered by a drabe', they said. That'll be young Millie Hipwood, who didn't dare tell her mum and then went out gathering firewood. I was up all night with that one," Nanny muttered. "Fine girl she produced. It's a slander! What's a drabe?" she added.

"Words," said Granny, half to herself. "That's all that's left. Words."

"And now there's a man with a trumpet come on. What's he going to do? Oh. End of Act One," said Nanny.

The words won't be forgotten, thought Granny. They've got a power to them. They're damn good words, as words go.

There was yet another rattle of thunder, which ended with the kind of crash made, for example, by a sheet of tin escaping from someone's hands and hitting the wall.

In the world outside the stage the heat pressed down like a pillow, squeezing the very life out of the air. Granny saw a footman bend down to the Duke's ear. No, he won't stop the play. Of course he won't. He wants it to run its course.

The Duke must have felt the heat of her gaze on the back of his neck. He turned, focused on her, and gave her a strange little smile. Then he nudged his wife. They both laughed.

Granny Weatherwax was often angry. She considered it one of her strong points. Genuine anger was one of the world's great creative forces. But you had to learn how to control it. That didn't mean you let it trickle away. It meant you dammed it, carefully, let it develop a working head, let it drown whole valleys of the mind and then, just when the whole structure was about to collapse, opened a tiny pipeline at the

base and let the iron-hard stream of wrath power the turbines of revenge.

She felt the land below her, even through several feet of foundations, flagstones, one thickness of leather and two thicknesses of sock. She felt it waiting.

She heard the king say. "My own flesh and blood? Why has he done this to me? I'm going to confront him!"

She gently took Nanny Ogg's hand. "Come, Gytha," she said.

Lord Felmet sat back in his throne and beamed madly at the world, which was looking good right at the moment. Things were working out better than he had dared to hope. He could feel the past melting behind him, like ice in the spring thaw.

On an impulse he called the footman back. "Find the captain of the guard," he said, "and tell him to find the witches and arrest them."

The Duchess snorted. "Remember what happened last time, foolish man?"

"We left two of them loose," said the Duke. "This time...all three. The tide of public feeling is on our side. That sort of thing affects witches, depend upon it."

The Duchess cracked her knuckles to indicate her view of public opinion.

"You must admit, my treasure, that the experiment seems to be working."

"It would appear so."

"Very well. Don't just stand there, man. Before the play ends, tell him. Those witches are to be under lock and key."

Death adjusted his cardboard skull in front of the mirror, twitched his cowl into a suitable shape, stood back and considered the general effect. It was going to be his first speaking part. He wanted to get it right.

"Cower now, Brief Mortals," he said. "For I am Death, 'Gainst Whom No...no...no...Hwel, against whom no?"

"Oh, good grief, Dafe. 'Gainst whom no lock will hold nor fasten'd portal bar', I really don't see why you should have difficulty with...not that way up, you idiots!" Hwel strode off through the backstage melee in pursuit of a pair of importunate scene shifters.

"Right," said Death, to no-one in particular. He turned back to the mirror. "'Gainst Whom No... Tumpty-Tum...nor Tumpty-Tumpty bar'," he said, uncertainly, and flourished his scythe. The end fell off.

"Do you think I'm fearsome enough?" he said, as he tried to fix it on again.

Tomjon, who was sitting on his hump and trying to drink some tea, gave him an encouraging nod. "No problem, my friend," he said. "Compared to a visit from you, even Death himself would hold no fears. But you could try a bit more hollowness."

"How d'you mean?"

Tomjon put down his cup. Shadows seemed to move across his face; his eyes sank, his lips drew back from his teeth, his skin stretched and paled. 'I HAVE COME TO GET YOU, YOU TERRIBLE ACTOR' he intoned, each syllable falling into place like a coffin lid. His features sprang back into shape. "Like that," he said.

Dafe, who had flattened himself against the wall, relaxed a bit and gave a nervous giggle. "Gods, I don't know how you do it," he said. "Honestly, I'll never be as good as you."

"There really isn't anything to it. Now run along, Hwel's fit to be tied as it is."

Dafe gave him a look of gratitude and ran off to help with the scene shifting.

Tomjon sipped his tea uneasily, the backstage noises whirring around him like so much fog. He was worried. Hwel had said that everything about the play was fine, except for the play itself. And Tomjon kept thinking that the play itself was trying to force itself into a different shape. His mind had been hearing other words, just too faint for hearing. It was almost like eavesdropping a conversation. He'd had to shout more to drown out the buzzing in his head.

This wasn't right. Once a play was written it was, well, written. It shouldn't come alive and start twisting itself around. No wonder everyone needed prompting all the time. The play was writhing under their hands, trying to change itself.

Ye gods, he'd be glad to get out of this spooky castle, and away from this mad Death. He glanced around, decided that it would be some time before the next act was called, and wandered aimlessly in search of fresher air.

A door yielded to his touch and he stepped out onto the battlements. He pushed it shut behind him, cutting off the sounds of the stage and replacing them by a velvet hush. There was a livid sunset imprisoned behind bars of cloud, but the air was as still as a mill pond and as hot as a furnace. In the forest below some night bird screamed.

He walked to the other end of the battlements and peered down into the sheer depths of the gorge. Far beneath, the Lancre boiled in its eternal mists. He turned, and walked into a draught of such icy coldness that he gasped.

Unusual breezes plucked at his clothing. There was a strange muttering in his ear, as though someone was trying to talk to him but couldn't get the speed right. He stood rigid for a moment, getting his breath, and then fled for the door.

"But we're *not* witches!"

"Why do you look like them, then? Tie their hands, lads."

"Yes, excuse me, but we're not *really* witches!"

The captain of the guard looked from face to face. His gaze took in the pointy hats, the disordered hair smelling of damp haystacks, the sickly green complexions and the herd of warts. Guard captain for the Duke wasn't a job that offered long-term prospects for those who used initiative. Three witches had been called for, and these seemed to fit the bill.

The captain never went to the theatre. When he was on the rack of adolescence he'd been badly frightened by a Punch and Judy show, and since then had taken pains to avoid any organized entertainment and had kept away from anywhere where crocodiles could conceivably be expected. He'd spent the last jour enjoying a quiet drink in the guardroom.

"I said tie their hands, didn't I?" he snapped.

"Shall we gag them as well, cap'n?"

"But if you'd just *listen*, we're with the theatre –"

"Yes," said the captain, shuddering. "Gag them."

"Please..."

The captain leaned down and stared at three pairs of frightened eyes. He was trembling. "That," he said, "is the last time *you'll* eat anyone's sausage."

He was aware that now the soldiers were giving him odd looks as well. He coughed and pulled himself together.

"Very well then, my theatrical witches," he said. "You've done your show, and now it's time for your applause." He nodded to his men. "Clap them in chains," he said.

Three other witches sat in the gloom behind the stage, staring vacantly into the darkness. Granny Weatherwax had picked up a copy of the script, which she peered at from time to time, as if seeking ideas. "'Divers alarums and excursions'," she read, uncertainly.

"That means lots of terrible happenings," said Magrat. "You always put that in plays."

"Alarums and what?" said Nanny Ogg, who hadn't been listening.

"Excursions," said Magrat patiently.

"Oh." Nanny Ogg brightened a bit. "The seaside would be nice," she said.

"Do shut up, Gytha," said Granny Weatherwax, "They're not for you. They're only for divers, like it says. Probably so they can recover from all them alarums."

"We can't let this happen," said Magrat, quickly and loudly. "If this gets about, witches'll always be old hags with green blusher."

"And meddlin' in the affairs of kings," said Nanny. "Which we never do, as is well known."

"It's not the meddlin' I object to," said Granny Weatherwax, her chin on her hand. "It's the *evil* meddling."

"And the unkindness to animals," muttered Magrat. "All that stuff about eye of dog and ear of toad. *No-one* uses that kind of stuff."

Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg carefully avoided one another's faces. "Drabe!" said Nanny Ogg bitterly.

"Witches just aren't like that," said Magrat. "We live in harmony with the great cycles of Nature, and do no harm to anyone, and it's wicked of them to say we don't. We ought to fill their bones with hot lead."

The other two looked at her with a certain amount of surprised admiration. She blushed, although not greenly, and looked at her knees. "Goodie Whemper did a recipe," she confessed. "It's quite easy. What you do is, you get some lead, and you –"

"I don't think that would be appropriate," said Granny carefully, after a certain amount of internal struggle. "It could give people the wrong idea."

"But not for long," said Nanny wistfully.

"No, we can't be having with that sort of thing," said Granny, a little more firmly this time. "We'd never hear the last of it."

"Why don't we just change the words?" said Magrat. "When they come back on stage we could just put the 'fluence on them so they forget what they're saying, and give them some new words."

"I suppose you're an expert at theatre words?" said Granny sarcastically. "They'd have to be the proper sort, otherwise people would suspect."

"Shouldn't be too difficult," said Nanny Ogg dismissively. "I've been studyin' it. You go tumpty-tumpty-tumpty."

Granny gave this some consideration. "There's more to it than that, I believe," she said. "Some of those speeches were very good. I couldn't understand hardly any of it."

"There's no trick to it at all," Nanny Ogg insisted. "Anyway, half of them are forgetting their lines as it is. It'll be easy."

"We could put words in their mouth?" said Magrat.

Nanny Ogg nodded. "I don't know about *new* words," she said. "But we can make them forget these words."

They both looked at Granny Weatherwax. She shrugged. "I suppose it's worth a try," she conceded.

"Witches as yet unborn will thank us for it," said Magrat ardently.

"Oh, good," said Granny.

"At last! What are you three playing at? We've been looking for you everywhere!"

The witches turned to see an irate dwarf trying to loom over them. "Us?" said Magrat. "But we're not in –"

"Oh yes you are, remember, we put it in last week. Act Two, Downstage, around the cauldron. You haven't got to say anything. You're symbolizing occult forces at work. Just be as wicked as you can. Come on, there's good lads. You've done well so far."

Hwel slapped Magrat on the bottom. "Good complexion you've got there, Wilph," he said encouragingly. "But for goodness sake use a bit more padding, you're still the wrong shape. Fine warts there, Billem. I must say," he added, standing back. "You look as nasty a bunch of hags as a body might hope to clap eyes on. Well done. Shame about the wigs. Now run along. Curtain up in one minute. Break a leg."

He gave Magrat another ringing slap on her rump, slightly hurting his hand, and hurried off to shout at someone else. None of the witches dared to speak. Magrat and Nanny Ogg found themselves instinctively turning towards Granny.

She sniffed. She looked up. She looked around. She looked at the brightly lit stage behind her. She brought her hands together with a clap that echoed around the castle, and then rubbed them together. "Useful," she said grimly. "Let's do the show right here."

Nanny squinted sullenly after Hwel. "Break your own leg," she predicted.

Hwel stood in the wings and gave the signal for the curtains. And for the thunder.

It didn't come.

"Thunder!" he hissed, in a voice heard by half the audience. "Get on with it!"

A voice from behind the nearest pillar wailed. "I went and bent the thunder, Hwel! It just goes clonk-clonk!"

Hwel stood in silence for a moment, counting. The company watched him, awe-struck but not, unfortunately, thunder struck. At last he raised his fists to the open sky and said, "I wanted a storm! Just a storm. Not even a big storm. Any storm. Now I want to make

myself absolutely CLEAR! I have had ENOUGH. I want thunder right NOW!"

The stab of lightning that answered him turned the multi-hued shadows of the castle into blinding white and searing black. It was followed by a roll of thunder, on cue.

It was the loudest noise Hwel had ever heard. It seemed to start inside his head and work its way outwards. It went on and on, shaking every stone in the castle. Dust rained down. A distant turret broke away with balletic slowness and, tumbling end over end, dropped gently into the hungry depths of the gorge.

When it finished it left a silence that rang like a bell. Hwel looked up at the sky. Great black clouds were blowing across the castle, blotting out the stars.

The storm was back.

It had spent ages learning its craft. It had spent years lurking in distant valleys. It had practiced for hours in front of a glacier. It had studied the great storms of the past. It had honed its art to perfection. And now, tonight, with what it could see was clearly an appreciative audience waiting for it, it was going to taken them by, well... tempest.

Hwel smiled. Perhaps the gods *did* listen, after all. He wished he'd asked for a really good wind machine as well. He gestured frantically at Tomjon. "Get on with it!"

The boy nodded, and launched into his main speech. "*And now our domination is complete* –"

Behind him on the stage the witches bent over the cauldron. "It's just tin, this one," hissed Nanny. "And it's full of all yuk."

"And the fire is just red paper," whispered Magrat. "It looked so real from up there, it's just red paper! Look, you can poke it –"

"Never mind," said Granny. "Just look busy, and wait until I say."

As the Evil King and the Good Duke began the exchange that was going to lead to the exciting Duel Scene they became uncomfortably aware of activity behind them, and occasional chuckles from the audience. After a totally inappropriate burst of laughter Tomjon risked a sideways glance.

One of the witches was taking their fire to bits. Another one was trying to clean the cauldron. The third one was sitting with her arms folded, glaring at him.

"*The very soil cries out at tyranny* –" said Wimsloe, and then caught the expression on Tomjon's face and followed his gaze. His voice trailed into silence.

"'And calls me forth for vengeance'," prompted Tomjon helpfully.

"B-but –", whispered Wimsloe, trying to point surreptitiously with his dagger.

"I wouldn't be seen dead with a cauldron like this," said Nanny Ogg, in a whisper loud enough to carry to the back of the courtyard. "Two days work with a scourer and a bucket of sand, is this."

"'And calls me forth for vengeance!'," hissed Tomjon. Out of the tail of his eye he saw Hwel in the wings, frozen in an attitude of incoherent rage.

"How do they make it flicker?" said Magrat.

"Be quiet, you two," said Granny. "You're upsetting people." She raised her hat to Wimsloe. "Go ahead, young man. Don't mind us."

"Wha?" said Wimsloe.

"Aha, it calls you forth for vengeance, does it?" said Tomjon, in desperation. "And the heavens cry revenge, too, I expect." On cue, the storm produced a thunderbolt that blew the top off another tower...

The Duke crouched in his seat, his face a panorama of fear. "There they are," he breathed. "That's them. What are they doing in my play? Who said they could be in my play?"

The Duchess, who was less inclined to deal in rhetorical questions, beckoned to the nearest guard.

On stage Tomjon was sweating under the entire load of the script. Wimsloe was incoherent. Now Gumridge, who was playing the part of the Good Duchess in a wig of flax, had lost the thread as well.

"Aha, thou callest me an evil king, though thou whisperest it so no save I may hear it," Tomjon croaked. "And thou hast *summoned the guard*, possibly by some most secret signal, owing nought to artifice of lips or tongue."

A guard came on crabwise, still tumbling from Hwel's shove. He stared at Granny Weatherwax. "Hwel says what the hell's going on?" he hissed.

"What was that?" said Tomjon. "Did I hear you say *I come, my lady*?"

"Get these people off, he says!"

Tomjon advanced to the front of the stage. "Thou babblest, man. See how I dodge thy tortoise spear. I *said*, see how I dodge thy tortoise spear. Thy spear, man. You're holding it in thy bloody hand, for goodness' sake."

The guard gave him a desperate, frozen grin.

Tomjon hesitated. Three other actors around him were staring fixedly at the witches. Looming up in front of him with all the inevitability of a tax demand was a sword fight during which, it was beginning to appear, he would have to parry his own wild thrusts and stab himself to death.

He turned to the three witches. His mouth opened. For the first time in his life his awesome memory let him down. He could think of nothing to say.

Granny Weatherwax stood up. She advanced to the edge of the stage. The audience held its breath. She held up a hand. "Ghosts of the mind and all device away, I bid the Truth to have," she hesitated, "it's tumpty-tumpty day."

Tomjon felt the chill engulf him. The others, too, jolted into life.

Up from out of the depth of their blank minds new words rushed, words red with blood and revenge, words that had echoed among the castle's stones, words stored in silicon, words that would have themselves heard, words that gripped their mouths so tightly that an attempt not to say them would result in a broken jaw.

"Do you fear him now?" said Gumridge. "And he so mazed with drink? Take his dagger, husband – you are a blade's width from the kingdom."

"I dare not," Wimsloe said, trying to look in astonishment at his own lips.

"Who will know?" Gumridge waved a hand towards the audience. He'd never act so well again. "See, there is only eyeless night. Take the dagger now, take the kingdom tomorrow. Have a stab at it, man."

Wimsloe's hand shook. "I have it, wife," he said. "Is this a dagger I see before me?"

"Of course it's a bloody dagger. Come on, do it now.

The weak deserve no mercy. We'll say he fell down the stairs."

"But people will suspect!"

"Are there no dungeons? Possession is nine parts of the law, husband, when what you possess is a knife."

Wimsloe drew his arm back. "I cannot! He has been kindness itself to me!"

"And you can be Death itself to him..."

Dafe could hear the voices a long way off. He adjusted his mask, checked the deathliness of his appearance in the mirror, and peered at the script in the empty backstage gloom. "'Cower Now, Brief Mortals'," he said. "'I Am Death, 'Gainst Who – 'Gainst Who –'"

WHOM.

"Thanks," said the boy distractedly. "'Gainst Whom No Lock May Hold –'"

*WILL* HOLD.

"'*Will* Hold Nor Fasten'd Portal Bar, Here To – to – to'"

HERE TO TAKE MY TALLY ON THIS NIGHT OF KINGS.

Dafe sagged. "You're so much better at it," he moaned. "You've got the right voice and you can remember the words." He turned around, "It's only three lines and Hwel will...have...my...guts...for."

He froze. His eyes widened and became two saucers of fear as Death snapped his fingers in front of the boy's rigid face.

FORGET, he commanded, and turned and stalked silently towards the wings.

His eyeless skull took in the line of costumes, the waxy debris of the makeup table. His empty nostrils snuffed up the mixed smell of mothballs, grease and sweat. There was something here, he thought, that nearly belonged to the gods. Humans had built a world inside the world, which reflected it in pretty much the same way as a drop of water reflects the landscape. And yet...and yet...

Inside this little world they had taken pains to put all the things you might think they would want to escape from – hatred, fear, tyranny, and so forth. Death was intrigued. They thought they wanted to be taken further out of themselves, and every art humans dreamt up took them further *in*. He was fascinated.

He was here for a very particular and precise purpose. There was a soul to be claimed. There was no time for inconsequentialities. But what was time, after all?

His feet did an involuntary little clicking dance across the stones. Alone, in the grey shadows, Death tapdanced. "– THE NEXT NIGHT IN YOUR DRESSING ROOM THEY HANG A STAR –"

He pulled himself together, adjusted his scythe, and waited silently for his cue.

He'd never missed one yet.

He was going to get out there and slay them.

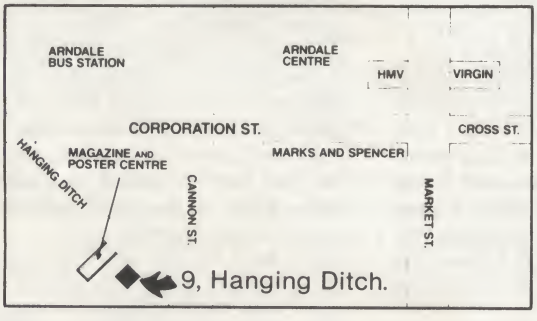
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**Terry Pratchett**, born in 1948, has been entertaining millions of readers in recent years with his "Discworld" novels – especially since the appearance of the howlingly funny *Equal Rites* (1987), which first introduced the character of Granny Weatherwax. The above is a specially-adapted extract from his latest novel, *Wyrd Sisters*, which is due to be published by Gollancz in November 1988 (price £10.95).


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# Leigh Kennedy
# Interview by Paul Kincaid

*Leigh Kennedy comes from Denver, though she moved to Austin, Texas, in 1980 where she was closely associated with that city's extraordinary crop of science-fiction writers, including Bruce Sterling and Howard Waldrop. She has been living in England for the last two years or so. Her short story "Her Furry Face," (collected in* Faces, *Cape 1986), and her first novel,* The Journal of Nicholas the American *(Cape, 1986), have both been nominated for the Nebula Award. Her most recent novel,* Saint Hiroshima *(Bloomsbury, 1987), is an indication that she has been moving away from sf of late – which seemed a suitable starting point for our conversation.*

**Do you consider yourself a science-fiction writer?**
That's very difficult. I definitely used to. I aspired to be one of the best sf writers. I read science fiction, I thought science fiction, I went to conventions. I loved sf. But I don't know whether it changed or I changed, or both things happened at the same time. I still feel a connection to it; I have a lot of respect for good science fiction, when it can be found.
**A lot of what you write seems to edge around the interests of sf even if it doesn't go into the heartland of it. In *Saint Hiroshima*, for instance, you're writing about what 50% of sf writers are writing about, but you've done it without writing a science-fiction novel.**
That wasn't a deliberate evasion of sf. The novel came to me as it was. I used to say, when people asked me if it was science fiction, that it was a book written by someone who used to write science fiction. I realized what I cared about when I was writing it is stuff that sf cares about too.
**One of the stories in *Faces*, "Tuning," is an episode from *Saint Hiroshima*. Did you have the novel in mind when you wrote the story?**
Bits of it, yeah.
**Some of it was given away in there, there are so many hints of things outside the story. But the main nuclear theme is not even suggested.**
I suppose a good way to explain all that is to explain the way I write. I envy the writers who go to their desk one day, sharpen their pencils, wipe it down, get a cup of coffee and say: "All right, I'm going to write a novel." They start at page one and nine months later they finish. Sometimes two years or three years. But I've never been able to write anything like that.

I have written some first drafts of stories all in one go. But with longer works, even long stories, I usually write a first draft, or attempt a first draft, and get fed up and say this isn't quite what I want. So I put it away and work on something else, or I rewrite it.

I actually feel, at this moment, that I could pull out the first story I ever wrote from my files – which I didn't sell – and take paragraphs from it and write something now from it. Nothing is ever finished until I've sent it away to a publisher and they've bought it. That's the only way I finish them.
**How do you realize that the thing has reached a stage to send it away?**
I suppose one of the markers is that I'm really secretive about the stuff that's rough. There's a particular stage where I feel like now it's time to show it to a friend. So I'll show it to a friend or two, or take it to a workshop – well, I used to go to workshops – and when it got to that stage it was closer to being finished. Depending on what people said I'd either put it away for a while, or immediately get to work polishing it.

So, with *Saint Hiroshima*, I think I started a story that's sort of in the centre of the book, about a piano player, probably about 1975. I actually finished the novel in 1986.
**How did the atomic fears come into it?**
I think by the time I had enough that I could pull a bit of it out and make a short story to sell, I already was working on a novel and the bomb shelter was in it, but it wasn't so pervasive through the whole story then. I was more fixed on the idea of writing about a piano player with a past, and Katie wasn't very well formed then. Sometimes it's just a matter of pushing two things together. I think that Katie came from something else, another of those old manuscripts.
**You often seem to write about people on the periphery, people who, for some reason or other, are outside the normal way of going on. Nicholas the American is a prime example. Why? Do you feel an outsider?**
Yes. I suppose this is just my personal view of the world, I've always felt on the edge of things. I've been close to groups – in fact when I was deeply into science fiction I felt closer to being in a group when I went to a convention than I ever had in my life; but, I think, one thing you can say about sf that's probably generally true is that a lot of the people feel like outsiders. You sit in a room with these people and you realize that everyone feels ill at ease, but interested. I've always felt like that as well, there's always something out of the pattern that others were in. It was the way I was, I never felt that I fit in anywhere. I think a lot of writers feel that way, I think it's part of being the observer.
**The other thing that I get out of the stories is a sense of regret. They seem to circle round people losing something or missing something. In "The Silent Cradle," about the invisible child, the sense of regret is made physical. Are you aware of this?**
People have told me that I write about loss, but it seems to me that a lot of the fiction that I read is about the same sort of thing. I don't know, maybe it's my interpretation. I like Russian novels and short stories, and an editor once pointed out to me that that could be where my influence was, because the Russians were always writing about loss.
**Is that why Nicholas is a Russian?**
Yes, and also because I once worked in a hospital in Denver. It was a Jewish hospital and a lot of the patients and workers there were Russian Jews. So I knew a lot of them... I don't know what it is, when I was around foreigners in America they found me very attractive. Maybe because I had the patience to listen to them, and also some Americans are unnerved by foreigners.
**Do you feel attracted to them? You quite often write about people adrift in a foreign country.**
Well, now it's me. I'm just taking my turn. I wrote *Saint Hiroshima* while I was here [in Britain]. I mean the second-to-last and final drafts. But I haven't written much since then. Actually, I'm starting to feel that I would like to go back for a time, just a short

time, to America and sort of take a look again.

**Do you feel that America is inspiration?**

The ideas I have are always still in American settings. I did try to write one story that was set in England – it was a science-fiction story and I have to admit it wasn't a very good story. I sent it to an editor – she's also a friend of mine – who sent it back and said something like: "the English setting is silly." She didn't say it quite like that, but I thought it's just that she's biased towards American things and she thinks that any setting that's not American is... But looking back on it now I think it was really just placed on top of the story like a hat, it wasn't really part of it. It would take me years to write about Britain.

**You feel you have to be an insider before you can write as an outsider?**

Yes. That's an interesting observation.

**You mentioned working in the hospital, and I wonder if that's the inspiration for the strongest scene in *Nicholas the American*, when he visits Susanna in hospital, dying?**

Oh yeah. I worked on a surgical floor where people were in all the time for tumours and so on. I wasn't a nurse but I worked at the desk as a secretary, and patients would come up and they'd lean over the desk and they'd ask me for an orange juice first before they'd launch into their medical history and life story and tell me about their husbands and wives and grandmothers. I heard a lot of this. I suppose it's good experience for someone who wants to write about people, but it's pretty depressing sometimes.

The same is true in the children's hospital I worked in. It was even harder because the patients were children and the people who talked to me were the parents, and they were even more upset than husbands and wives get. Understandably so. It's so sad to see little ones going.

**One of the stories in *Faces* has a future setting.**

"Belling Martha," about the ice age in Texas, yes. I suppose it was wishful thinking at the time I wrote it.

**But other than that you don't seem to have gone in for outright science-fictional settings or themes.**

Well, not all the sf stories I've written were in *Faces*. One of my own favourite stories – I've not read it for a long time and I'm probably not even supposed to have favourites, isn't it against the rules? – anyway, one of my favourites, which I'll probably never re-read because I want to keep my fond memories of it, was in *Universe 12* and was called "Helen, Whose Face Launched 28 Conestoga Hovercraft." It's set on one of the L5 colonies, but it's after the technology of orbiting habitation had gone so far beyond what we talk about now that this place has become the old dump, and it's just been turned into a tourist place. It's got mountains like Colorado at one end and the other end is all Pakistanis, and it's how these people get along with each other.

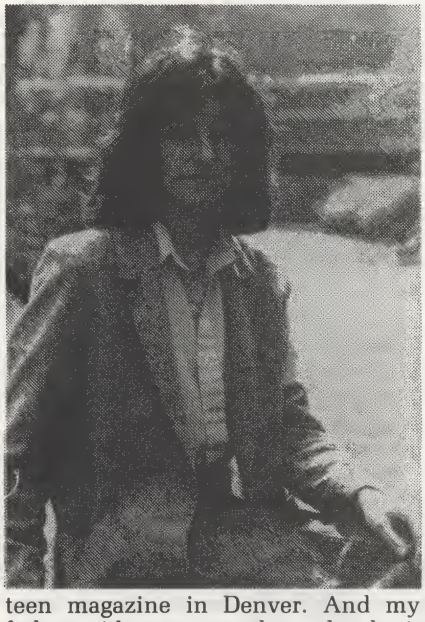
**Again foreigners, it always seems to come back to that.**

Yeah, I suppose it's obvious that I had to become one some day.

**You sold your first story at 13. How did that come about?**

There's a foreigner in that one too.

When I was 12 and 13 it was when the Beatles were still touring the world, and I had it bad. I was a real Beatles fan. I'd been writing stories all my life, ever since I'd learned how to write. My father was a commercial artist so he'd do a lot of design stuff for advertising, and he met the editor of this up-and-coming magazine, a local



teen magazine in Denver. And my father said to me one day, why don't you give me one of your stories to give to John? I said, Oh I don't know, I don't have anything to publish. I was just writing for me. I gave my father a short little thing, it was actually just two columns of the magazine. It sounds silly now and I'm sure it must be terribly embarrassing to look at, but I was on a train in England – which I'd never seen before, except in photographs and on the TV news and that – and gosh I just happened to sit next to George Harrison and I was the only one who recognized him. So, anyway, that was that story.

**And how long was it before your next sale?**

Well I don't think I even submitted anything for publication until I was 18, five years later, because I found that experience so embarrassing that it put me off. I actually wanted to be a writer, and all through that time I was subscribing to a magazine called *Writers' Digest*. I don't know if there's an equivalent here, it has markets and writers' tips.

**There's a thing called *Writers' Monthly*.**

Oh yeah, I've seen that, it's a lot like that. I read that every month; someday I was going to be a writer. But I didn't think I was good enough. For one thing I noticed that everyone else in *Writers' Digest* was at least 18. So I just kept writing away, and when I was 18 I started submitting to some of the women's magazines. Nothing came of that except form rejections.

Then I started concentrating on my studying. I suppose I lost interest, I was headed towards some sort of career. I always saw writing as something I would do, but I had to do something meanwhile like be a teacher or nurse. What I actually wanted to be was an historian, and here I am. I still have my degree in history.

**When did you move to Austin and get involved with the people there?**

I moved in 1980. I was fed up with Denver because before they even invented the word Yuppie I was sick of what it meant. Denver was getting glossy, a lot of fern bars and discos and young people with lots of money. Denver was growing. I wanted something a little slower paced and laid back.

I met Howard Waldrop at a convention in Denver and he said "Come visit me." So I got on a plane and visited, and I loved Austin. It was shabby, a little country city, all these people were good natured and slow, you know, drink beer and tell stories. It seemed perfect to me at the time, so I packed up and went down there.

**You were already writing science fiction at the time? How come?**

Yeah. For a time I was married to someone who was interested in sf. He was a hard-core fan, and he was giving me books to read. At first he would give me Heinlein and Asimov, and I thought these were kind of interesting. Then he started handing me Le Guin and *Stand on Zanzibar* and Silverberg – the good Silverberg – and I just caught fire. I still think good science fiction is exceptionally good literature because it's so exciting.

**The people in Austin, particularly Sterling, have very forceful ideas about what sf is and should be. Did you find yourself having to conform to what they thought you should be writing?**

Well, I have this memory of being on a panel with Bruce at a convention in Texas – I think it was Bryan, Texas – and he was going on about science fiction as is his way. He's got very definite ideas about what sf is and isn't, and suddenly I said: "Bruce, you make me feel like I don't write science fiction at all." Half the audience went "Aww!" So when I heard him expound I felt like I didn't fit in to any sort of thing that he was writing about, it just wasn't sf. As if maybe I was just putting things

in to make it sf. I mean, I never felt that I was doing that. It makes more sense to take things out to make it not science fiction, because it does no good for a writer's reputation to be caught writing sf – though I don't think it should be treated like that just because of the bad ones. So I don't think I compared myself to them too much.

**And then came *Faces*. There's this great assumption that publishers hate short-story collections, you can't sell collections anywhere. And yet your first book is a short-story collection.**

I don't know how this happened.

The whole story is that, even years and years later, I was still reading *Writers' Digest*. Actually I'd graduated to a little higher class magazine called *The Writer*, but it was still basically the same idea. I always looked in the back to see prizes, grants and things like that. I was working in a full-time job and I was sick of it, and I was hoping that somehow I could find someone who would give me lots of money and let me write a novel and quit my job. You know, this whole dream of being a full-time writer.

So I saw one called the Drue Heinz Award, and they wanted a collection of short stories. The stories could be published, but the whole collection had to be unpublished. Well, I could do that, so I gathered some of what I thought were my best stories, and the stories I had access to – I sold one story to *Omni*, and I signed the contract that gives everything away. I sent it to them and they didn't give me the award but I was shortlisted. They sent me a letter that was so encouraging, I realized that maybe I was actually going to be a writer after all, rather than just selling a story her and there every few months. They said, "Oh, we're sure that you won't have any trouble selling it." I started getting letters from New York agents, and from editors, they were asking everyone who'd been shortlisted. At the same time Chris Priest was starting up his literary agency – he was taking American books and selling them here – so he said "why don't you give it to me, and I'll see what I can do." And he sold it for me.

**And it wasn't long afterwards that *Nicholas the American* appeared.**

I think Cape bought *Faces* in January, and I gave them the manuscript for *Nicholas* in February. Something like that. I hadn't just written all those short stories, they were hanging around waiting to be collected. So it wasn't like writing two books all at once, because *Nicholas* had been going on for a long time.

**How did you get the idea for *Nicholas*? Did it start out as another story and grow?**

No, I think it always was what it became, but it did have different forms. The characters shifted round. The first three or four drafts were not in journal form, or even in first person. In fact I find it pretty difficult to write in first person, it's an extremely hard thing for me to do. Some people find it a lot more natural. I've started so many things in first person and thought "yeuch, this is terrible," and ripped it up – well, not rip it up, put it away and start over in the third person and be much happier.

**I wonder, did *Saint Hiroshima* precede *Nicholas*?**

I suppose they were both evolving at the same time. Maybe it did. The thing is, they'd be neck and neck and one would move out ahead and be more polished and finished and shaped, but then I'd work on the other.

**And what about the next book?**

I have a lot written on one book that's set in Washington in 1932. It's my first try at a historical.

**I suppose as a historian it's a fairly natural thing to do.**

I suppose. It's also pretty difficult. I think it's easier to make up your own future and stick things in it than try to work into the past. Especially one that people still remember.

It's interesting, though. I've always been interested in the Depression era. And the whole culture of it, not just the politics but the films, the books, the ideas, the roaming across America that happened at that time. Suddenly people picked up and whole families went away into different states. Up to then people were a lot more settled, they'd grow up and die in the same place. It changed America forever.

But I want to tell this story about the Bonus March. I'm sure it's not something that English schoolchildren learn about. In 1932 the World War One veterans marched on Washington to demand the bonus they'd been promised in 1924 that was due to be paid in 1944. But they were hungry and they wanted it now because they needed it now. But the government wouldn't pay them, at least not in 1932, they eventually got it in 1936. 24,000 veterans and their families marched to Washington and camped there for a month and a half, and my book is about several different people.

**As books get into print, do you find the writing becomes a quicker, more fluid process?**

No. This is frightening because a collection of short stories wiped out years of work – as did finishing *Nicholas* and *Saint Hiroshima*, because they were going along together. I actually have to do a lot more first draft writing. But I do have other things in mind.

**Do you find short stories more difficult than novels?**

Oh yeah. Per word. It's much easier to write 60,000 words of a novel than 60,000 words of short stories. Although in a sense you feel more experimental with short stories, so you may not take it quite as seriously as a novel. A novel is what people are going to see and talk about, whereas you always feel a short story is something you show to some friends and they say "Oh, I like that," and the editor buys it and you get money for it, but then it seems to disappear until later, and it might haunt you then.

So you tend to be a little more experimental, whereas with a novel you feel you have to get it as right as you possibly can. There's that pressure.

**You don't feel you can experiment with a novel?**

I don't know, maybe I'm conservative about that.

**I got the feeling that *Nicholas* and *Saint Hiroshima* were both fairly experimental in their own way.**

Well, thank you. Since my prose is rather unornamented I always feel that people are going to think that my books are simple. They might be simple, you can never judge that yourself.

**Is the fact that they're unornamented something that you have to work at?**

I have to clean it up. That's something that goes into all this rewriting. Taking out the sentimental bits and the unnecessary things, and making things clearer.

**Leigh Kennedy, thank you very much.**

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***Editor's note:*** *Leigh Kennedy's novel* Saint Hiroshima *(Bloomsbury, 1987) is forthcoming from Sphere Books as an Abacus paperback in early 1989.*


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# Susan Beetlestone
## Face Lift

Abigail added an over-generous tip to the bill and signed the authorization for transfer of funds with a more modest flourish than was her usual practice. Handing the document over to the beauty technician, she was careful not to look directly into the woman's face, to cause no offence.

She was uncomfortably aware that she might have met this dough-faced woman socially, that behind the familiar features of some acquaintance this anonymous flesh might be concealed. It was no fantasy. The technicians were paid so well that they could easily maintain as good a life as Abigail's. They would show their public faces only outside the Clinic where no-one would know them.

For a moment she wished her bribe unpaid, though she knew that to keep them in style was to keep them quiet and loyal to their clients.

In the foyer she met a friend coming in. Thanks to the ministrations of the Clinic they might have been taken for sisters. Blonde, full-mouthed, high cheeked, perfect. On this uneasy territory they barely acknowledge each other, the one moving into the impersonal world of the image makers, the other moving out of it, relieved to have her identity restored.

Abigail's sage green Rolls was waiting for her. Sliding behind the wheel was the final act of reinstatement for the self she believed in, though the last of the tension did not leave her until she had pulled out of the Clinic's private forecourt and onto wide, tree-lined Chrome Drive. Thinking of Bobby for a moment, a dull pressure began to build behind her right eye.

She turned off Chrome Drive, down Brighton Avenue and onto Valley Way, drawing up right outside the gallery. Out of the car, she leaned against its polished flank feeling the sun-heated bodywork burning her skin through the fine cloth of her dress. Her own name faced her in black lettering across the gallery façade. One more real thing.

It was cool and quiet inside, white walls hung with noisy paintings which Abigail did not stop to look at. She had only come here to avoid having to go home right away. She nodded in passing to Gunther, her gallery assistant, who was discussing a group of bronze castings with a client in tones of high rapture.

She didn't even spare that much attention for her secretary, but swept by into her private office. This was a spacious room with windows set high in the walls so that only the sky was visible through them. There were plants in profusion, but only one painting, the portrait of a dark woman. This woman had evidently been combing her untidy hair, since now she held out the comb for the inspection of the viewer, black hairs tangled in its teeth. Stylized tears fell from her eyes. Her lips were parted, and her chest had been peeled open to reveal her heart. Behind her a fragment of blue sky was threatened by dark jungle foliage. Abigail did not look at the painting.

Ten minutes alone and she thought she would be able to go out and be a little more human. On her desk, the "message" light of her personal 'phone line was winking steadily.

It took her those ten minutes to nerve herself up to allowing the message to play, because she was sure it would be from Bobby. She had been waiting for the silence to crack open for days now.

The voice that spoke up to her from the machine was a woman's – soft and faintly accented, not at all like Bobby's, but very familiar to her.

"Hello Abigail. This is Jess. I've got enough work ready for a show. You can come out and look at it anytime now. I'll see you..."

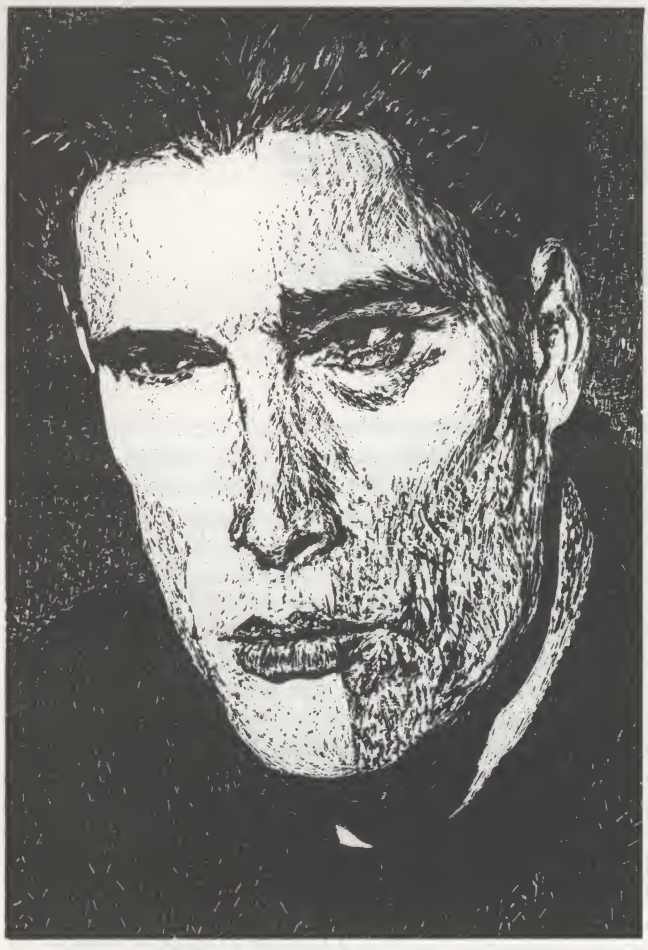
There was a hesitation, as if Jess was thinking of saying something more. Abigail unconsciously held her breath, but only the click of the line disconnecting followed.

Now she did look up at the painting where the face of Jess Summercloud looked out at her. Though she was just too far away to see the detail clearly, she knew that the hairs in the comb were thin black snakes, imprisoned within each tear was a tiny foetus, between the parted lips a laughing face looked out, and the exposed heart was composed of entangled human bodies. There were strange things in the foliage too, but Abigail failed to see them. It was a disturbing, but somehow accurate self portrait of the artist and Abigail never liked to look at it. She had hung it here only to prove her faith in the merit of the less saleable work that Summercloud produced.

The machine began another message, cutting through an image that had formed in her mind.

"Abby? I'm sorry about the way I've been lately. Come home early this evening, so we can talk –" Abigail shut off Bobby's voice with a stab of her finger.

Eighteen months ago Jess had gone away – South, Abigail thought – and had only returned to the country five months before. In that time she supposed the painter had been working, since there had been no sign of her, and not so much as a note. Jess was often unsociable for long periods, but five months was far longer than usual. Abigail was afraid that it was



Illustrations by Barbara Hills

some kind of criticism of herself, as if she couldn't be trusted not to damage the work in progress by imposing her own values on it.

Jess's work ranged from perfectly executed expressions of the currently fashionable style, to odd and uncomfortably personal exposures. The fashionable work sold best, especially here in her home city, so for her own economic comfort she continued to turn it out. An impression of Jess's living face hung in the false space behind Abigail's eyelids. A powerful face, fine bones, dark, deep eyes, a wide mouth. It was a face which compelled attention, though too strong to be beautiful. Jess might have designed it herself.

Crackling over the wide gravel drive, the otherwise silent car, cocooned in its accretion of symbolism, drew to a gentle halt in front of the house doors. Abigail did not get out straight away. Her car was more comfortable to her than her home. Inside that house lived uncertainty, tension and the crumbling of a finely-balanced world. She touched her renewed face, her new clothes, and knowing that superficialities were deeply important, took some confidence from them.

Bobby was in the drawing-room, sprawled in a comfortable armchair with a drink in his hand. When he heard her come in he got up. He was just under a head taller than she and dark to contrast with her fairness. His body was compact and firm from his daily exercise regime. The face he turned to her was handsome along traditional lines – strong-jawed yet with a straight, elegant nose and a mouth full enough to be sensual, yet still masculine. Bobby's charm had always lain in his amiable lack of depth, but now he seemed to be making a belated attempt to mature, to achieve significance. He took a swallow from the stiffener in his glass and said, "Abby, we have to talk."

She laughed.

"All right. Give me half an hour. I need to shower. It's so *hot*." Out of the room before he could take in enough air to say anything else.

She turned the lock on her bathroom door and leaned against the sink, waiting for the sickness to subside. In the mirror her reflection seemed distorted and shaky. She didn't want to have to go through this scene. Her peace was in Bobby's foolish hands and she had no way of recovering it other than to let him work through whatever troublesome feelings had got into him. She despised herself for ever allowing Bobby the power to humiliate her in this way. Once, she had "loved" him. Now her feelings were far more complex and consequently out of her control.

It wasn't that she didn't want to know what was wrong with Bobby, just that she'd rather he left her a note about it than struggled in his clumsy way to tell her face to face. Emotional problems were a new thing for him, and Abigail knew that he'd never catch up enough to be able to talk about such matters in a useful way. Soon he'd begin to whine, perhaps even to cry. Phrases he'd heard in TV shows would issue from his mouth. He would smash their tidy and successful life to pieces using the language of the soap opera. All across the country thousands of other marriages were going down the same way, and that was what hurt most of all; money, status and intelligence had not made Abigail's life any different in its emotional essentials from the lives of millions of others. The only different person she knew was Jess, and the price she paid for her difference was incomprehensible.

Abigail bent down over the sink and rubbed gently around her eyes, loosening her face from there first, then around the inside of her mouth. Her fingers moved in little circles over the rest of her face, massaging in the prescribed manner to break the face-skin bond. Easing the new face off gently, she laid it beside the sink, outside up. It died slowly, the colour fading from it as it cooled. She stroked it, feeling the almost invisible down of light-diffusing hairs. If she had stroked the inside her fingertips would have left a trail of colour as the heat from them reactivated the sensitive chromatophores which gave this lovely face its life.

Bobby had been too absorbed in his own problems to notice the improvements; the finer skintone, subtler shading of the contours, the refinements to the shape of the mouth. He had once always been careful to notice improvements or changes in her appearance, but now his attention was turned inwards.

It *was* her face. The thin but immensely strong cellular material of which it was composed bonded to the musculature of her flesh and formed a precise mapping of the structure it covered, except where honeycomb modelling lifted the new skin closer to the ideal of contemporary beauty. The face moved with her, blushed with her, glowed with her, millions of chromatophores responding to changes in the blood flow beneath them. It was "nature identical," except where it was better.

Her mother had taken her for her first face when

she was eleven. She remembered how afraid she'd been that the thing would fall off if she so much as smiled. Gradually she'd come to trust it. A succession of subtly changing faces had brought her to the best model at eighteen. It had continued to be enhanced by new techniques through the years, but it was still essentially the same face. It was a real part of her. Without it she was diminished.

The exposed flesh revealed no cheekbones to speak of, the chin was too short, the nose too small, lips too thin, the complexion imperfect. There were wrinkles around the eyes and across the forehead. Featureless, it looked to her, this other self. There was no locus of familiarity within it. Abigail hardly ever looked at it. Today she studied it for at least a minute, but found nothing there. Only the blue eyes were the same.

She popped out her coloured contact lenses and left them to soak while she took her shower.

Freshly dried and delicately perfumed, Abigail cleaned the inside of her face and eased it over her eyelids, nose and mouth, pressing outwards to the fine blending edges. She replaced the contact lenses and by the time she looked up at her reflection, her face was fully coloured and alive. Her hair shone. She was gorgeous. In cherry-red silk she was irresistible. She hoped that one sight of her would drive all thought of painful confrontations from Bobby's head, but it was a pale, consumptive, dying hope.

Bobby was pouring himself another drink when she found him, his back turned to her.

"So, you wanted to talk?" she said, echoing his own words, hoping they'd sound empty to him too.

He didn't turn right away. He didn't turn for at least a minute. Then he did, slowly, and Abigail saw a stranger. It wasn't Bobby, but it was. His face, she noticed in alarm, was hanging over a bottle of Jim Beam on the bar. The revealed flesh was older, paler. She'd never seen it before, never wanted to. There were the beginnings of wrinkles in it, and bags under the eyes. The nose was much the same, at least, but the rest seemed collapsed. Worst was the day's growth of dark stubble, which proved Bobby to be a secret slob who'd never bothered to have his unsightly facial hair removed. The animal quality of those black hairs revolted her. It was a struggle to keep that feeling from her expression.

"Abby, please," said Bobby, in a voice which betrayed all the shades of feeling from misery to abject misery, "Lots of couples take off their faces when they're together."

"I don't know of any," she snapped.

"Well, it's not something you'd talk about, I suppose."

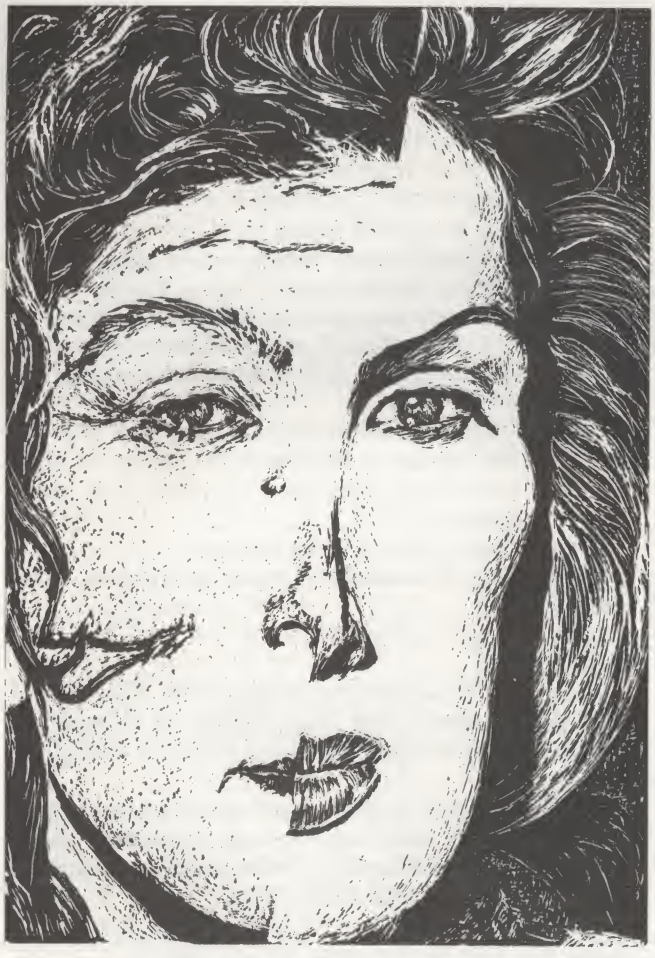
"The reason no-one talks about it is that they don't do it."

The skin around his mouth was slack, she noticed. He looked underfunded. He struggled for some words to make her understand, and she watched him struggle.

"I've been feeling like I don't know anyone at all, not even you." His phrasing was as clumsy as his uncovered flesh. "I need to know someone. I need to know *you*. Please take it off, Abby."

Her mother hadn't seen her unfaced for twenty years. She had hardly seen herself that way.





"This *is* me," she said. No good. He thought they could achieve in five minutes something they'd never even tried to do once before in all their time together.

"I feel so alone," he whined.

Abigail couldn't stand any more of this. Bobby just wasn't up to what he was trying to become. She couldn't watch, and she certainly couldn't participate.

"I have to go out again," she said, turning away from him.

"Where are you going?" he called after her, humiliation and disappointment in his voice.

The sun was going down. She drove for miles through neighbourhoods grading down the social scale to aluminium and plastic shacks crowding the vague edges of the carnivorous city. Once, someone got up enough energy to throw an empty can at the passing gleam of her car, but it only bounced off the impervious paintwork. Abigail didn't notice.

Jess's studio was in the dry, lonely countryside, on a few acres of land between two vast, unprofitable farms. Even in the dark Abigail knew the way well. She drew up in front of the rambling wooden house in which the painter lived the creative part of her secret life. Jess came to the front door before Abigail had got out of the car. She was wearing dirty old clothes and smelled of sweat and paint, half animal, half artist. Wholly alien.

She led Abigail straight into the studio, assuming she had only come to see the new work and to make a choice for the show. The whole house was very ill lit for some reason. In the studio, one dim light was all there was to see by as Jess began sorting through the canvases. She slowed down and finally gave up altogether as Abigail's distraction filled the room with a thick, cloying atmosphere. The sight of that powerful face, deepened by shadow, turned questioningly on her gave Abigail the excuse she needed. She started to talk. The whole thing came out in a jumble hardly more articulate than anything expressed by Bobby himself, and completely lacking the insight that Abigail was sure she did have, somewhere.

When Abigail had run out of steam, Jess went and put the lights up full. She turned back as Bobby had turned, slowly, but there was a faint smile on her lips. She looked tired, older. There were dark circles crisscrossed with wrinkles under Jess's large hazel eyes. Abigail was puzzled.

"What you always saw was only flesh. I'm what you might call a natural work of art. Couldn't afford one of those things when I was starting out, and never needed one. No-one could ever tell the difference. Until now." Jess grinned and chucked Abigail under the chin to get her to shut her mouth.

"I've been ill," she said. "I don't recover as fast as I used to. I suppose, to keep the respect of my paying customers, I'll have to resort to artifice too. Never mind, it'll go pretty well with my best selling work."

"Um," said Abigail. More than ever, Jess was a creature from an unknown world. The painter reached out to touch Abigail's full red lips, then with sensitive fingers sought the edges of the mask.

"How do you get this thing off?" she asked.

Abigail pushed the inquisitive fingers away from her face and acting under an impulse that was more than half fear, removed it herself. She watched Jess take it away from her and examine the fine work of the features and the sensitivity of the chromatophores with fascination as they faded to white, except for the handprint of colour where they fed on the warmth of her own flesh. After a while she put it aside and turned back to the naked Abigail, who was aware that she stood rigid, chin up, as if bravely awaiting an ordeal. Jess's scrutiny was agony. The painter stepped back and took in the sight from all angles, impassive as a beauty technician.

"No great beauty," she said. "But interesting."

Abigail frowned in annoyance. She couldn't stop herself. Jess laughed so loud the noise hurt, then she planted a stinging kiss on Abigail's exposed mouth.

Little Abby cried her contact lenses out.

It was nearly dawn when she got home. Not tired, not herself.

Judging from the state of disarray in which she found him, Bobby had had time to get drunk and sober up again twice over. From the way he looked at her out of his replaced face she could see that he was working himself up to a heart-rending apology scene. It was someone else, and not Abigail, who forestalled that awful prospect by sitting down beside him and beginning to loosen the edges of her mask. From the corner of her eye she saw a bewildered apprehensive look take him over, and deduced that he had had time to change his mind after all. She smiled a cruel smile. He wasn't going to get out of what he'd started without suffering a little more.

A portrait was the first painting you saw as you came into the Summercloud exhibition. Few people studied it for long since it wasn't in a familiar style, nor was it attractive. Abigail stayed by it, watching the empty reactions of those invited to the private view. Further into the exhibition excited knots had formed in front of larger, vigorous canvases whose meanings, if obscure, were at least obscure in a fashionable style and alarming colours.

She noticed that Jess had added a last-minute title to the catalogue number. "Unknown Woman," it said. That was annoying. Very annoying. She stared closely at the quickly-worked surface of the painting, the pallor of the woman's shamefully ordinary looking face. Yet there was something there, she thought. A character, but what kind? She didn't know what it meant any more than anyone else, except the painter.

"That's a joke, I hope," Bobby said, coming up behind her. "I hope the rest are better or Jessie will be going out of style."

Abigail looked into his face. The old Bobby was reinstated, amiable, boyish and uncomplicated, but she found nothing comforting in that anymore.

He grinned at her, frowned at the portrait and never a flicker of recognition marred his features with doubt. The world, he thought, was as it had always been and he could still be comfortable in it. His little "breakdown" was forgotten. He had forgotten.

Jess breasted her way through the enthusiastic crowd towards them. She was dressed in purple, her face restored, no sign of age or fatigue in it.

She and Abigail kissed, cheek to cheek, fake to fake. Bobby moved away, momentarily disturbed by the painter's presence.

"I'll never get used to this," Jess whispered, touching her false cheek. "I've decided to become a total recluse instead. Pretty romantic, don't you think? Should put my prices up by quite a bit."

Abigail tried to laugh. For the first time in twenty years she felt the old fear that her face was about to peel off in public. It was because she had remembered there was another face underneath.

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**Susan Beetlestone** is a dropout astrophysicist who has held a number of odd jobs (including the preparation of Elton John's royalty accounts). She is currently studying for a BSc in Psychology at Birkbeck College, and writing a novel which she describes as "a neurological science-fiction murder mystery." The above is her first published short story.

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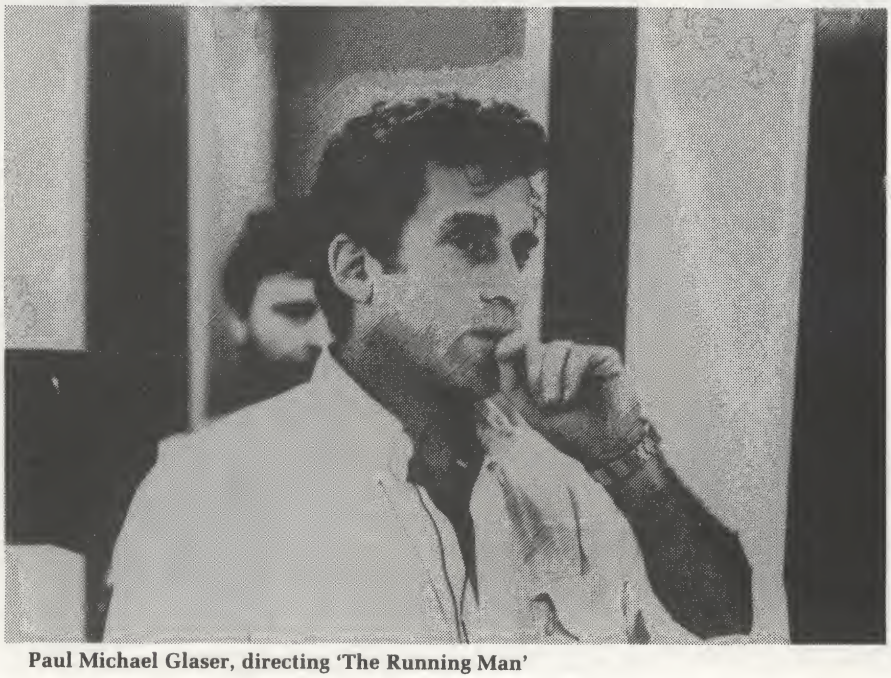
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# Mutant Popcorn
## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Overhead, without any fuss, the stars are going out. It wasn't so long ago there were real stars on the screen, not just actors and clowns. Look at Jack Nicholson, a star well into the seventies; now even his agent seems to have accepted he's fit only for clown roles. Remember Eastwood, de Niro, Fonda? all true stars within living memory, now tumbled down the Hertzsprung-Russell curve to burned-out X-ray curiosities. What you turn into seems to depend on your initial mass and luminosity: the real heavyweights, the OABs, tend to collapse to clowns, while the less massive presences linger on for a faintly glowing senescence in koff serious koff koff dramatic roles. All the women, for instance, turn into actresses; the males who survive as actors tend to be those like Martin Sheen or Harvey Keitel who never quite made it as naked-eye objects to begin with. To qualify as a real star, you need to be plainly visible to the amateur observer, which is why those remaining luminaries of the screen who clearly cut it in other respects (Dennis Hopper, Harry Dean Stanton, Michael Moriarty) seem a bit pale and twinkly against the memory of ancient fires. And this prompts to wonder: if the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore! – or would we sink into barbarism and philistine anarchy, our primitive mentalities unable to cope with the marvel?

I'm speaking, of course, about Arnold. He cannot act, they clamour. He turns scripts into vehicles, cry the savage legions. What's wrong with us? Are we really so short of mind? Could John Wayne "act," or Cary Grant, or Orson Welles after 1945? Are these meaningful terms in which to discuss celestial bodies? Star quality is muted and diminished by any recourse to what is normally understood by acting: true stars do not act, but *perform*. You can't appreciate a star performance by going through the reflex critical motions. Actor or not, Arnold is an unrivalled performer, projecting a unique and surprisingly complex brand of grimly laconic humour with a minimalism of dialogue and expressiveness that would leave any mere actor crippled. It's a style of performance ideally suited to the medium, and especially to the kind of comic-book (I hope we can now use this term without pejorative reflection) character he's made so inimitably his own. We should worship his brilliance while we can, before he burns out into clown in three to five movies' time. All it would take, after all, is for some bright prankster to strip him naked, shave his head, and paint him blue all over.



**Paul Michael Glaser, directing 'The Running Man'**

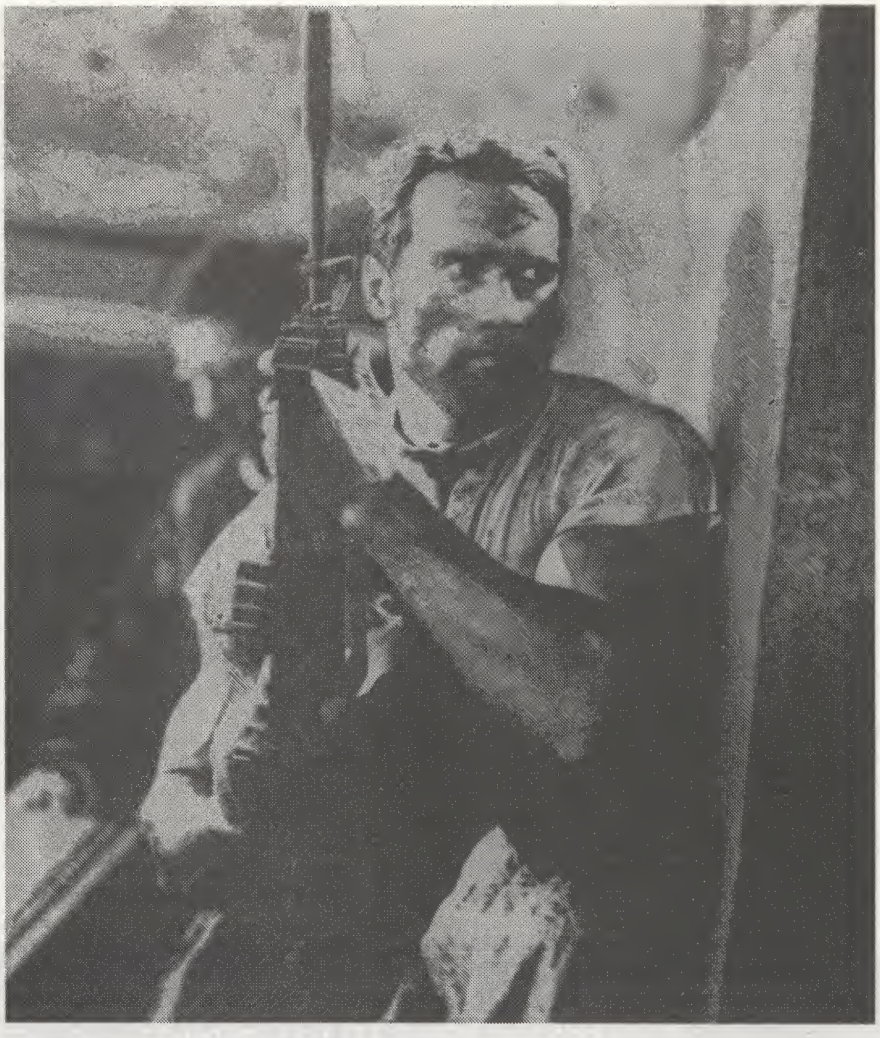
In the meantime, **The Running Man** is a close-to-perfect Arnie picture, fast, silly, and violent, owing rather less to its Stephen "Bachman" King original than the average Bond movie does to Ian Fleming. Arn is a future cop in totalitarian 2019 LA, where dissidents and enemies of the state are served up as contestants on the stalk 'n' kill game show of the title. In an absurd opening sequence he rashly tries to prevent a police massacre of unarmed demonstrators and gets framed for the slaughter himself; busts out of labour camp and holes up with outraged Maria Conchita Alonso, and when she blows the whistle both of them end up on the show. But, there's hope: if they can last the course, they can reach the secret satellite transmitter and jam the show nationwide with devastating subversive broadcasts from underground resistance leader Mick Fleetwood (remember him? used to be in a good blues band in the sixties). Nobody's ever survived before, of course, but what do *you* think? Starsky (for it is he) helms our man past some awkward long sentences in the early scenes through a more comfortable territory of exploding heads, chainsaw duels, and a long parade of retired football stars in supervillain costumes, with some quite good dumb media jokes and fetchingly idiotic skintight rubber suits for the big A and his sultry Venezuelan temptress. What more, really? "The plot didn't hang together. I couldn't relate to any of the characters. It didn't seem to have anything to say." Go away, little person, and watch small films with actors in them. The future is not for such as you.

Meanwhile, outside the genre crop is one completely beautiful autumn movie with eyes truly turned to the stars. The affection Peter Greenaway still commands within the British sf community goes back around a decade to the wonderful crop of avant-garde fantasy shorts he spooled off in the late seventies, culminating in the astonishing and not at all short sf docudrama *The Falls*. At that time, Greenaway films seemed a perfect

cocktail of the obsessions and techniques thriving in the post-*New Worlds* written genre: human transcendence, apocalyptic comedy, and a peculiarly English tension between pastoral romanticism and ironic formal games. The conscious affinities of *The Draughtsman's Contract* with filmed sf have been repeatedly acknowledged by the director, and even his less overtly fantastic productions often flirt with genre perspectives and themes – notably in the great evolution movie *A Zed and Two Noughts*.

**Drowning by Numbers** is scarcely an sf film in any orthodox sense, despite a throwaway monster roaming the Suffolk countryside, three women who may or may not be the same person, and an opening catalogue of a hundred star names in which reality and bizarre invention disconcertingly jumble; but it is a film with an instantly recognizable sf mentality. Mainstream critics have real trouble with Greenaway: the dialogue rings unnaturally, the characters seem cold, the acting is often wildly erratic, and the dizzying counterpoint of images and ideas is seen as pretentious self-indulgent doodling. "I guess you either love it or hate it," the conversation usually ends, with the glowering implication that if you love it you must be sick, deluded, or lying. They will then make an exception for *The Belly of an Architect* (comparatively speaking, the dud in the canon) "because of Brian Dennehy's performance." Well, sf gourmands are well trained to respond to this kind of litany of inept whingeing: that's all very well, we bite short of saying aloud, but what do all you zombies do for pleasure? My spine goes wet with horror at the thought of a world where *Ironweed* and *A Handful of Dust* are the best you get. If you can't be stirred at least as profoundly by ideas as by emotions, then something's defective or loose with your basic humanity. I'm not saying we-are-Slan or anything, but it does strike me that someone who can understand why (say) Ian Watson is good enjoys a little something extra in their response to the universe. And I hope they'd find that something extra in *Drowning by Numbers*; which, for what it matters, is the best Greenaway in ages, and for my pennies the most enjoyable movie yet this year.

There's absolutely no point in summarizing the plot, which is typical, or the themes, which for once are refreshingly frivolous. Enough to say it's a postmodern comedy about the ages of woman and the expendability of the male, set in a surrealistically observed coastal Suffolk of sheep, water, Sam Palmer treescapes, prolific road kills, more sheep, leaf drifts, timber follies, and much more water, where everything seems to be permanently sodden and stencilled with inscrutable numbers. Names of stars and rules of games (also mingling the strange-but-true with the sheerly fantastic), circumcision and cricket, food, fireworks, entomology, and the myth of Samson: these, with much else, contribute themes to the usual giddy fugue on sex and death. Like the best Greenaway, it creates an alien world of lushly treacherous beauty from the estranged observation of a real terrestrial landscape; and a ravishing Michael Nyman score refers back to the Mozart cutups of *The Falls*, from which the main characters and many of the references descend. Unlike most Greenaway, it's enlivened further by some killingly funny scenes and superb performances – especially from Juliet Stevenson, here coaxed at long last to a wonderful big-screen debut. The already-notorious gimmick of trailing the numbers 1 to 100 in sequence through the movie (sometimes in plain view, sometimes disguised or encoded) offers a new and dangerously addictive filmwatching experience, as well as some lighthearted reflections on old Greenaway themes of pattern, accident, and the editor's game. The fertile Mr G recently announced plans (undoubtedly doomed) for *The Falls II*. Fortunately the concept is too perfect ever to become reality.



**Arnold Schwarzenegger in 'The Running Man'**

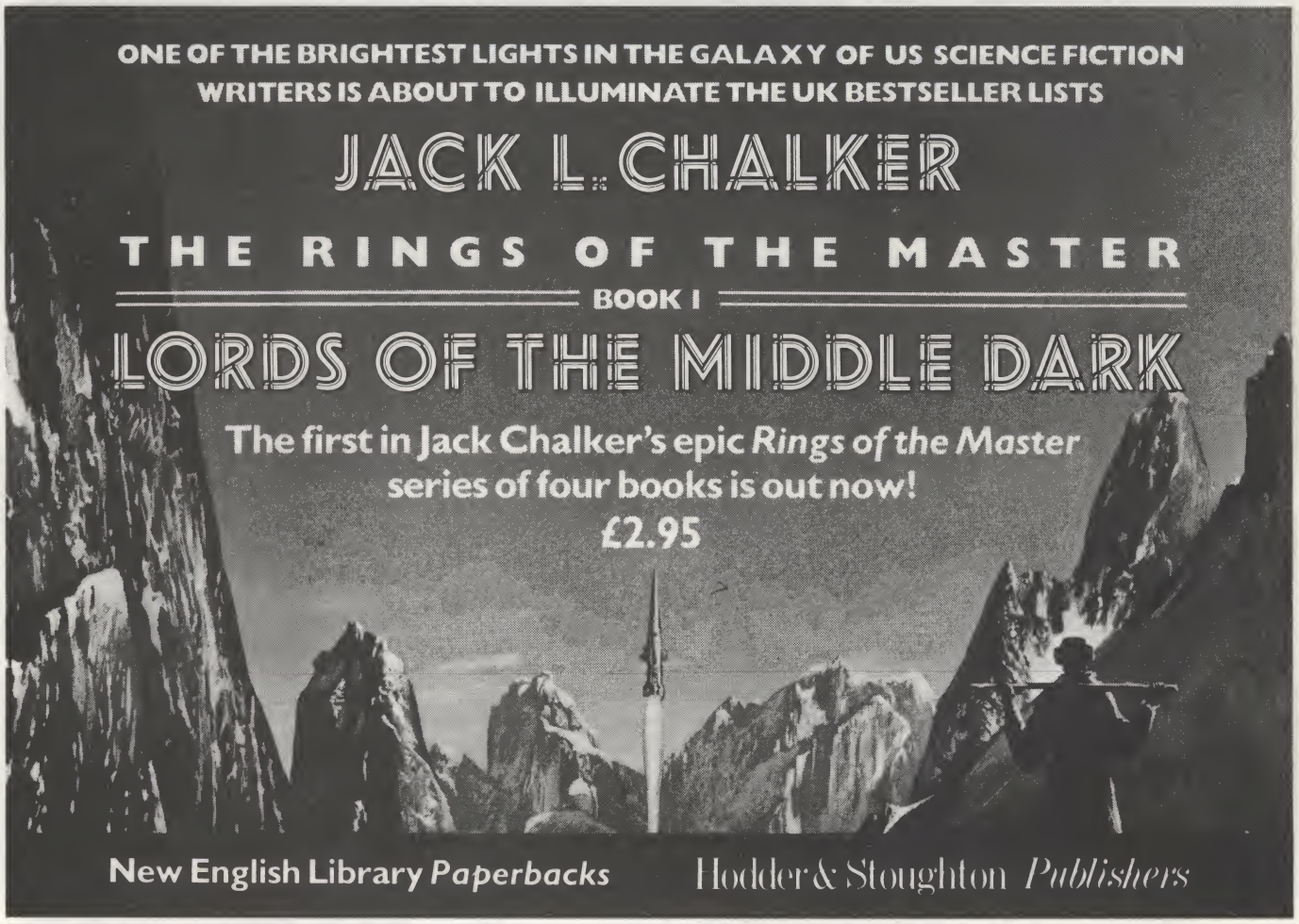
Still in the wacky individualist auteurs department, but down among the end-of-line seasonal special purchases, lurks a real oddity, Mike Jittlov's **The Wizard of Speed and Time**. Long in coming and uncertain of wide release, this is the full-length feature version of animator Jittlov's acclaimed four-minute short from 1982: a puzzling spec to begin with, as the short was an innocuously plot-free escapade in musical stop-motion starring a running green wizard and a garage full of dancing tripods and film cans. The solution is as simple as it is, well, simple: the big version is a live-action movie about the fun, farce, and frustration of making an animated short. Zany effects genius Mike Jittlov (Mike Jittlov) is commissioned to produce a stupefyingly brilliant short film for a TV special in an impossibly short time with neither budget nor facilities, and little suspecting that his commissioning producer has laid a massive bet that the project will fail. Jittlov's only assets are his brain-sweatingly colossal talent, his irresistability to women, and the fact that everyone in Hollywood really respects somebody who cares about what he does even if he's a charmless dork who lives with his mum and flaunts a dress sense even

Californians recognize as terminal. The plot and people aren't up to much, but many of the effects and throwaways are quite witty, and it does offer some fascinating observation of Hollywood subculture, where special-effects men are viewed in much the same way as programmers and model railway enthusiasts in societies marginally closer to reality. The film's main handicap is Jittlov himself, who comes over (rightly or wrongly) as a serious prat and deeply flaky person whose interest in the universe is confined to rather childish moviemaking and observing the circumference of his own ego. Few of the other characters have much more going for them; the romantic interest makes her first appearance in a car with the bumper legend "Honk if you love unicorns," tempting the powerful option of discarding your ciggy down her gastank if you don't. There isn't nearly enough animation – we never see the tripods scene in full, though the running wizard sequence is quite flashily remade – and what there is is puffed rather too generously for its rather tame virtuosity. There's little here that wouldn't be taken for granted on MTV, which is perhaps where Jittlov might do best to look for a home. When the legendary Robert Breer can do classy videos for New Order, it seems a touch perverse to insist that the animator's integrity is only preserved in the Gilliam/Burton step up to live-action feature directing.

Finally, a late welcome for the best of the summer's kiddie flics, Fred Dekker's genre nostalgia comedy **The Monster Squad**, in which a gang of twelve-year-old *Famous Monsters of Filmland* addicts defend hometown USA and the American family against the entire platoon of Universal's classic monsters. Ironically, the notional target audience of twelve-year-old *FM* addicts weren't allowed to see it under its UK certification; but its real charm in any case is as an adult nostalgia piece, brilliantly evoking the strange pre-teen subculture of monster fandom, which uncannily doesn't seem to have changed in twenty years. Ancient, rather chronic b&w films you're not allowed to see acquire a strange second-hand mystique through breathless resumés in exclamatory F.J. Ackerman prose, and curiously stirring photographs of period starlets in bridal clothes making faces at large, pawing humanoids. Even then, in the last days of Hammer, monster movies were an exhausted, rather touchingly unscary genre: a minor problem for Dekker's film, which has to work hard to make most of its lumbering gaggle seem even remotely threatening for an audience of jaded video-generation adolescents. But for anyone who passed through the *FM* phase in youth, this movie polishes up priceless memories of a fascinating presexual universe of obsession, and still leaves you with change from an hour and a half. At the same time, it's probably the last of many nails in Universal's monster pic coffin, so the nostalgic element is somewhat bittersweetened by the knowledge that you're watching the final, flickering burnout of a once-brilliant cluster of stars: the fading remembrance of what was once, in a modest way, the City of God.

*Interzone* has new distributors – though specialist sf and fantasy dealers can still obtain the magazine through Titan Distributors, PO Box 250, London E3 4RT (tel. 01-980 6167/8), with whom we have a long-standing relationship.

The new distributors are Diamond-Europress (for the news trade) and Central Books (for general bookshops). Their addresses and phone numbers are given on page 3. Readers could help us greatly by passing this information to newsagents or booksellers who do not already stock *Interzone*. Thanks!

9 DIVS
SEPERATE
GA(9)

# John Sladek
## Stop Evolution in its Tracks!

Creationists are seldom colourful, exuberant characters. Their name, which ought to remind us of burgeoning life, somehow calls to mind the dusty relics of another age: celluloid collars, tent meetings, barns bearing giant advertisements for laxative. For the most part, the colourful and the exuberant have deserted this unprofitable philosophy.

One exception is Professor Abner Z. Gurns, founder of the Gurns Institute for Advanced Creationist Studies. Gurns is known for other things besides creationism. There was "prayer-wars," his patented defence system employing, he claims, a crew of the lesser angels to defuse godless Soviet missiles in flight. Before that there was his attempt to translate the Bible into a virus, for innoculation of the whole world...And before that, his planned expedition to raise Noah's Ark, which he believed to have sunk "somewhere near the East Pole."

If Professor Gurns has a place in history, however, it will most likely be that of the father of modern creationism. Few have done as much for this controversial field as Gurns; no one has established anything remotely rivalling the Gurns Institute.

I went to interview the professor at the Institute, a cluster of modern buildings on a bluff overlooking the sturdy little town of Stove Bolt, Tennessee. The building containing Gurns's office is a no-nonsense structure of glass and steel, the kind that might pass elsewhere for a school of business administration. The only visible clue to its higher mission is the motto carved above the entrance:

WHEN ADAM DELVED AND EVE SPAN
WHO WAS THEN AN ORANGUTAN?

I waited for the professor in a bland anteroom. The only unusual note was a large framed photo on the wall. It showed ants eating a red rose. The title, I saw, was "Paths Untaken."

While I waited, I glanced through a selection of the Institute tracts ("The Great DNA Fraud"; "Fossils – God's Joke on Darwin?"). Somehow they didn't go with that disturbing photo.

I found myself trying to form a picture of my host. Based on a couple of blurry news photos, I imagined him to be a quaint fellow in a celluloid collar and rimless glasses, sporting a watchchain on his snuff-stained vest. The watch would be set to Central Standard Time.

On the contrary, Professor Abner Gurns turned out to be a boyish thirty-year-old with a crew cut and an athletic handshake. His white lab coat was open to show a sweatshirt with a picture of William Jennings Bryan (in a celluloid collar).

"I was trained as a scientist," he explained. "For years I struggled with the so-called theory of evolution, trying to make sense out of it. Heck, if it was in the textbooks, it just had to be true, right?" His boyish grin appeared.

"Well something happened one day that hit me like a ton of assorted lightning rods. It made me see that Darwin's theory of evolution is nothing but hogwash and hokum! The American public – heck, the world public! – had been deceived for a century. It was time to take off the blinders and do some real science. So I came out here and founded the Institute."

He led me into his office, where a glass wall showed the grassy bluff, and the tiny town of Stove Bolt far below. Why had he picked this place for his Institute?

"Because Stove Bolt is the place where in 1923 they held the famous Snopes Monkey Trial – the first great victory for Creationism in our century."

What was his discovery? Professor Gurns sat on the edge of his desk and explained.

"I was studying fossils night and day, spending my days at the Natural History Museum, my nights hitting the books. Trying and trying to make sense out of evolution. Then one day on my lunch hour I wandered out on the street and got knocked down by a bus. When I got up, everything seemed strange. The people were strange. I saw purple hair. I saw this short blind man wearing a derby. He was leading this tall man who played on the derby with drumsticks. I saw a dog on wheels. Then this Yellow Cab pulled up, and I looked inside – *and the whole back seat was filled with one gigantic cabbage.*"

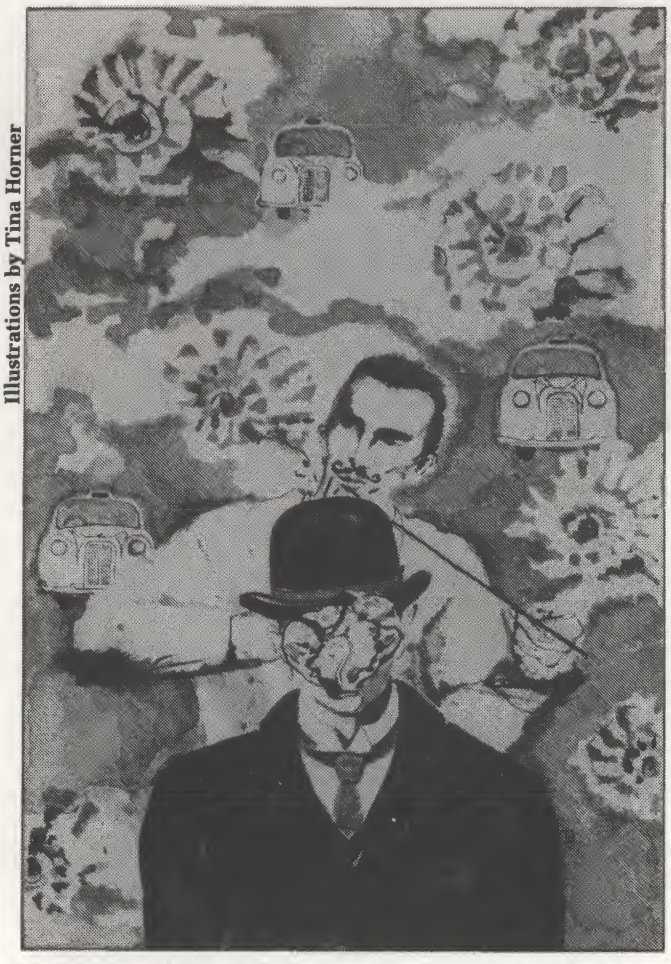
I asked the professor what all this meant to him.

"It means that nothing in the fossil world makes sense. I got more wisdom from one hairline fracture than from years of studying! I learned that we have to take fossils for what they are, and stop trying to piece them together into a story. Evolution is a fake."

He picked up a flat stone from his desk and held it in both hands. I saw that it was an ammonite, a common fossil.

"You know, Darwinists always accuse us of not studying the fossil record. That just ain't so. Speaking as a scientist, I have always been primarily interested in the fossil record – that is, the fossils themselves, and not what a bunch of Darwinists try to tell me about the fossils.

"They claim that fossils show evolution – one animal turning into another. Hogwash! There is not one



Illustrations by Tina Horner

fossil anywhere that shows one animal turning into another. *Every fossil you can find is perfectly still – not moving or changing at all!*"

He put down the ammonite and picked up what looked like a soup bone. "This here bone comes from one animal and one animal only, am I right? Speaking as a scientist, am I right?"

I had to agree.

"Okay, then. Anybody who tells you this here bone came from two or three animals has to be a darn fool." His eyes narrowed, and he waved the bone like a club. "A fool or an atheistic Darwinizer!"

A bell rang somewhere. He looked at his (ordinary digital wrist-) watch. "I got a lecture right now. Come along and sit in."

I followed him to the Wilberforce Auditorium, where perhaps a hundred students were seated, eager to receive his message. I sat to the side where I could watch them. They seemed a pretty typical bunch of kids, though slightly subdued.

"Speaking as a scientist," he began, "it just beats me how anybody can believe in the evolutionary fairy tale for five minutes!" There was some nervous laughter and applause.

"Evolutionists will tell you how some little old amoeba evolved itself into some bigger bug, and how that evolved itself into a fish, and so on, right up the scale until the ape evolved itself into a man. But there's two things wrong with that cockeyed story.

"In the first place, the amoebas never evolved at all. They're still here! Speaking as a scientist, I can vouch for that! I have looked down a microscope myself and seen them. They look like this."

He showed a slide of blobs. "Still the same little critturs they was when Noah marched them aboard the ark, two by two."

When the murmurs of amazement had died down, he continued: "In the second place, apes could not evolve into humans for a very simple reason: *There are no apes.* The things we call apes in zoos are nothing but men dressed up in hairy suits. I myself have visited a theatrical costume place where they rent such costumes. There they are, hairy suits *with nobody inside.*"

He showed several slides: a gorilla suit hanging on a rack, a man getting into the suit, the man wearing the suit minus the head, and a gorilla. The class murmured louder, apparently angry at the duplicity of the Darwinists.

A boy wearing a DON'T BE A MONKEY'S UNCLE sweatshirt put up his hand. "Sir, how can they lie to us like that? Isn't it unconstitutional?"

"Lying breaks an even higher law, Vern," said the professor. "Not that Darwinists care about that. But let's move right along to *survival of the fittest.* Can anyone tell me what that is supposed to mean? Yes, Sue Bob?"

A girl wearing a DON'T GO APE FOR DARWIN sweatshirt stood up. "It's circular reasoning, sir. They claim the ones who survive are the fittest. Then they try to prove this by pointing to the survivors – must be fit, because they survived."

"Exactly, Sue Bob. Can anybody imagine anything more ridiculous than survival of the fittest?"

Loud laughter and some applause.

"All over the country, folks are jogging and riding bikes, going to fitness centres, all to keep fit – but do they survive? Heck no, they all die eventually, same as everyone else. The fit shall perish with the unfit. Why, old Methuselah lived a lot longer than any jogger, and we know for a fact, he never rode a bike in his life."

The professor now seemed to be in training himself. He strode back and forth energetically as he talked, he flailed his arms, pounded the lectern, and spoke at times so rapidly that it was difficult to keep notes. There are, he said, five unanswerable arguments for Creationism:

**1. The universe is one grand design.** Nuclear physicists see electrons going around the atoms. (So do nuclear physicists.) Astronomers see planets and stars and stuff going round the sun. Everything goes round and round like the wheels of a watch. (This baffled many students until the professor used a large plastic model to demonstrate that watches once had wheels inside.)

The same careful planning shows up in the animal and vegetable kingdoms. A banana is easy to peel because it was made for peeling. Fish can swim, which is lucky, because they are invariably found in water. Our two ears are located on different sides of our heads to give us stereo hearing.

All of this design implies a designer – not to mention a team of draftsmen and production engineers. Butterflies and flowers come in lots of pretty colours, so a team of interior decorators are probably involved somewhere. Or take birdsong, which requires not only a composer, but an arranger, a producer, and a

musician's union.

**2. You can't evolve a sow's ear into a silk purse.** In other words, there is just no way that a simple crittur can make itself complicated. You might as well expect a gas mantle to turn into a chocolate grinder. (The professor explained these items.) Life is just what you make it, not something else.

**3. The great giraffe debate.** Atheistic Darwinizers may try to claim that the giraffe went around stretching its neck up to eat leaves from the trees for a few generations, and this made its neck grow longer.

The real truth is, giraffes didn't need to stretch at all, because their necks were already so long. Besides, what about dolphins? They live in the depths of the oceans where there are no trees at all. (This puzzled me and still does. I tried to ask the professor to elaborate on it, but nearby students told me to hush my mouth.)

**4. Everything invented by the Creator has some use.** Even a duck-billed platypus proves that the Creator had a fine sense of humour. What other use could it possibly have?

**5. All of the atheistic communists in Russia believe in evolution.** Enough said.

Professor Gurns concluded his lecture by offering to thrash anyone in the room who still believed in Darwinism. That brought applause and cheers from the students.

Among the students lingering after class to ask questions was a girl student wearing an EVOLUTION – NON, MERCI sweatshirt.

"Professor, are you absolutely sure ontogeny doesn't recapitulate phylogeny?"

Gurns stood in silence for a moment, holding his large watch model. Then he said, "Darla Jeanette, I wish you would rephrase that question."

"Well they say that during pregnancy, a human foetus looks at different stages like a fish, then a frog, then..."

"I don't see any point in dragging in talk like that, pregnancy and foetuses," he replied. "Young girl has no need to know about that stuff, no need at all. You tend to the fossil record, and leave the pregnancies to me."

The professor then conducted me to the Deluge Lab, where a magnificent full-size replica of Noah's Ark had been constructed. After hanging up his watch model in the corner, he explained what was going on here: Creationist graduate students were packing the Ark with pairs of stuffed animals, to prove that all of the species would too fit inside.

But as in all toy arks, the giraffes seemed to be giving trouble. Researchers were climbing ladders to take measurements of two stuffed ones.

"Maybe Noah laid them down," someone suggested. "They'd fit pretty good laid down."

"But their legs spread out a lot," someone else complained.

"Maybe Noah sawed off their legs. Hey, why not? There's nothing in Genesis says they had to have all animals with legs."

"Now, now, boys and girls," said Professor Gurns. "I'm sure you can come up with a better answer than that."

Back to his office, where the professor showed me a model of the Institute, with planned future development.

"We're still *evolving*," he said, with another boyish grin. "But seriously, we need to add a few departments to fill in all the gaps. For instance, we need some professional help in classifying the fossils of sea critturs. You know, fish fossils have been found way up on mountain slopes. The only explanation is, Noah's Flood covered even the highest peaks. We aim to prove that, once we get set up with our own Department of Marine Biology. It'll go right over here. We've already got a genuine marine to run it.

"Over here will be our anatomy department, plenty of work there, too. We need to study how the leopard got his spots, how the camel got his hump, how the whale got his throat, and all like that. Then there's the whole question of Adam and Eve's navels, a subject for some serious contemplation.

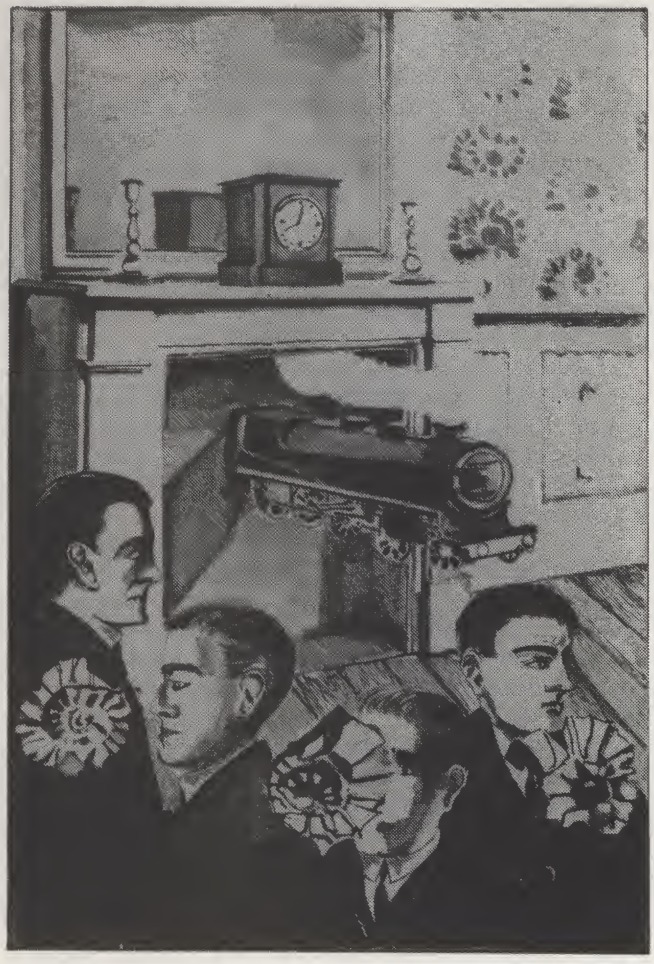
"And this area will be the new department of geophysics, to help prove how the earth is flat. For that, we'll need lots of surveying equipment, maps and so on. Probably need to buy some time on a satellite and get some real clear pictures of the earth from way high up. We like to be up-to-date, you know, use the latest technological –"

Footsteps came pelting down the hall. The door banged open and a student barged in, out of breath. "Professor, come quick! The giraffe is on fire!"

As we all hurried back to the lab, the student explained. One researcher, attempting to shrink one of the stuffed giraffes slightly with a heat gun, had set it ablaze.

By the time we arrived, the fire was out, and students





were opening skylights to dissipate the smoke. There was little visible damage to the animal itself. However, the great plastic model watch had melted and sagged.

As I left the Institute for Advanced Creationism, I looked out over the bluff, where students were flying kites shaped like glossy French loaves. Down below lay the town of Stove Bolt. I could just make out the little red courthouse where, more than sixty years before, the Snopes Monkey Trial had struck the first blow for Creationism. In that trial, a monkey named Snopes had been successfully prosecuted under Tennessee law for possessing an opposable thumb – a blasphemous imitation of human kind.

The Darwinists had been doing well in the trial until the very end. When the defence lawyer began his closing remarks, the jury was distracted by strange humming noises coming from within the courtroom fireplace. The humming was not like human humming, but the humming of steel rails. Finally the jury gave up all pretence of listening, and indeed the lawyer stopped speaking. All were transfixed, watching the dark hollow of the fireplace, waiting for an express train to come screaming out of the darkness and thundering through the tiny room.

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**John Sladek**, born in 1937 and described by critics as "the funniest sf writer around" and "one of the true and original lunatics of sf," scarcely needs an introduction to *IZ* readers. He appeared in our very first issue, with his story "Guesting," and in our fourth issue with the memorable "Calling All Gumdrops!" His novels over the years include *The Reproductive System* (1968), *The Muller-Fokker Effect* (1970), *Roderick* (1980) and *Tik-Tok* (1983).

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# Peoria My Destination!

## Christopher Priest

The first mistake Charles Platt makes ("Destination Gloom," *Interzone* 24) is to generalize about science fiction. The second is to generalize about Britain, and the third is to generalize about the U.S.A. This last is actually the most intriguing (and rather revealing), but let's get the first two out of the way.

All generalizations about "science fiction" are inherently fallible, if for no better reason than that one can always produce an exception as disproof. "Where do the Brits find the creative energy to write tales of mankind conquering the universe?" asks Platt rhetorically, and adds, "They don't." This immediately made me think of Eric Frank Russell's work, which was about almost nothing else. If you want to keep the argument to the present day (Russell being dead) a contemporary equivalent might be Bob Shaw. His work lacks the gung-ho quality one imagines from Platt's article is obligatory for American tastes, but otherwise it fills the bill.

There is no such thing as "science fiction"; there are only individual books written by individual writers. The curse of generalization is something all writers are up against, no less so those writers who appear under the "science fiction" publishing label (which is the only real manifestation of individual works in collective guise). Would you really judge all modern novels by the stands of Jeffrey Archer's books?; all poetry by Pam Ayres'?; all horror stories by James Herbert's? Or would you judge them instead by the standards of, respectively, William Golding, Seamus Heaney and Stephen King?

All special standards made into general cases are misleading, whether you aim high or low.

And generalizations are subjective. How can you know if *my* collective understanding of "science fiction," or Charles Platt's, or anyone else's, is the same as yours? "Oh, you write science fiction, do you?" says a stranger at a party, and the question is accompanied by a flash of body language which is the only clue to *his* prejudice: sometimes it's curiosity (the stranger has never read any science-fiction novels), or it's a condescending smirk (he has seen *Battlestar Galactica* or *Doctor Who*, and didn't like either), or it's admiration (he has read Wells or Gibson or Ballard or Le Guin, and thinks you're the same), or it's polite lack of interest (the next question is usually "Tell me, do you ever have anything published?").

Charles Platt's generalizations about Britain are all mixed up with what he says about our sf writers and their work. He sees the two as inextricable. This is a familiar theme. During my trips to America I've often heard similar remarks about "British science fiction": Platt's litany of woes is not exclusive to him. Whether we like it or not, our work has an image in the U.S. of being provincial, boring, depressing, a bit obscure... and on the whole not *quite* the right stuff.

So you say to the Americans who venture this opinion, "Well what about Mike Moorcock's books? Are they all these terrible things?" (Oh no, Moorcock's different.) "How about Brian Aldiss?" (No, he's different.) "Tanith Lee?" (She's different.) "Ballard?" (Different.) "Holdstock?" (Different.) And so on, until the list is run. None of it stands up to examination, and neither do Platt's generalizations about Britain.

Here, for instance, is his Orwellian vision of Britain:

"An endless succession of pokey little semi-detached houses" (has he ever been to Dallas?). "Small, shoddy hotel room" (has he ever stayed in a motel in New Mexico?). "Government funding for science is going to be cut still further" (the U.S. federal government is pouring billions of dollars into the arms race). "Symbolic preoccupation with impotence" (doesn't he read American mainstream novels?). "Government censorship" (why are files released through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act always delayed for several months while being censored... cf. Philip Agee, Graham Greene, etc?). "Pubs that close at eleven" (parts of the U.S.A. have liquor laws more repressive than some Muslim countries; e.g., Kansas makes it illegal for airlines to serve alcohol while flying over the state). "Foul weather" (has he ever been to Dallas?). And so on.

"I suppose it's understandable if British writers can't summon much enthusiasm about the future," says Charles Platt, convinced that Britain is a gloomy, restrictive place... but in saying this he makes a connection that interests me.

If you accept what he says at face value there's a tiny amount of truth in it. If it were theoretically possible to take all the British science-fiction novels of the last ten years, and render them down into an amalgam (a sort of "generic" British sf novel), and do the same with all the American books from the same period, it's likely that the two generic forms would be different. Many of Platt's generalizations would seem true... or true-ish.

Platt makes much of this academic exercise (impossible in the real world, of course), but what's really going on is that he dislikes Britain, and British life. In rejecting the society he has left he rejects a culture he no longer understands.

A parallel case might exist in the world of films. A "generic" American film would seem very different from a "generic" French, Swedish or Australian film. French movies, to generalize like Platt, are usually set in the present day, they don't have car chases or special effects, the dialogue rambles in a naturalistic way, they don't have Hollywood stars in them, the plots are often unresolved... and so on.

Here's Platt again, writing of M. John Harrison's work: "From the sunny perspective of, say, California, [Harrison] seems quite perverse in his preoccupation with death, deformity, and doom." Translate that into terms of cinema. At the risk of inflating Harrison's work too much, substitute Ingmar Bergman or Jean-Luc Godard. You could say, "From the sunny perspective of California, Godard's films seem quite perverse with his preoccupation with Marxism, revolution and Catholic guilt."

If those sunny Californians want to cut themselves off from other cultures, if they can accept only Sylvester Stallone movies as "real" movies, if their definition of a movie is confined to one with a tightly resolved plot, a car chase and a gunfight, lots of special effects and stunt action (etc.), then more fool them.

It's patently untrue. Doubtless there are a few sunny Californians who want nothing but mindless movie pap, but (a) there are probably just as many other Californians who are interested in *all* aspects of cinema, and (b) a considerable number of rained-upon British crave nothing but mindless movie pap.

The same is true of books, and of science-fiction books, and even of British books, and British science-fiction books. The public's taste for pap is an appalling constant.

Here we come across Charles Platt's third area of generalization. This is to my mind the most interesting, because it seems unconscious.

He depicts Americans as worldly, as believing "in human potential to change the world," as expansionist, optimistic, generous of spirit, unsmug, possessed of sunny perspectives, and so on.

Maybe so. Like many visitors from Britain, I have always been charmed by the sheer kindness, generosity and sincerity of the ordinary Americans I've met. The U.S.A. is a pleasant and stimulating place to visit, and, I assume, for most people a tremendously rewarding place to live.

But Charles Platt, in spite of his British blood, is now an urban American. More, he is a New Yorker who works in publishing. Like many such New Yorkers, Platt knows himself to be a cosmopolitan possessed of catholic tastes, equipped with a broad mind and having a sophisticated understanding of what is, and what is not, acceptable to the Great American Public.

There is a saying in the world of Hollywood, "Will it play in Peoria?"... meaning: we who cater to public tastes must never forget that we are an élite (with catholic tastes, broad minds, etc.), and must always remember that ordinary folks (e.g. in Peoria) are the ones who pay for what we do.

The attitude of many New Yorkers who work in publishing is exactly the same.

American writers suffer most from this, but I have experienced it myself and so have many other British writers. In short, work is often turned down because it is *perceived* to be unsuitable for the general American market, irrespective of intrinsic merit. It is bad enough having a book rejected anyway, but when the rejection is accompanied by some worldly-sounding comment about unacceptability to American tastes, mute fury is the only response. I know for certain that excellent writers like Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard and D.G. Compton have experienced this problem, and their books, when published, have often been in wholly unsuitable format. E.g., Ballard's *Crash* was published as an "avant garde" novel, and the cover made it look like pornography. (My own novel, *The Affirmation*, has never found an American paperback edition for reasons of presumed ideological incorrectness; meanwhile it has been translated into several language. How is it the Dutch, Swedish, French, Germans, etc., can put up with something the Americans can not?)

Charles Platt's generalizations about British science-fiction writers are to a certain extent tongue-in-cheek, of course, but behind them lies this same presumption. *He* has an admitted "personal weakness" for what he calls morbid stories, but he is a special case. The warning is not a personal one. As a New York intellectual he is warning us on behalf of the folks in Peoria.

The argument is false as it is presumptuous. The American public displays the same range of tastes as any other literate public, and there is as much room for "dour," "morbid" and "downbeat" British science-fiction writers as there is for their "optimistic" and "expansionist" American cousins.

**Charles Platt replies:**

*Chris Priest grudgingly concurs with my central point: British science fiction is different from American science fiction. He quibbles with my suggestion that the causes of this are environmental; but his list of "depressing" aspects of the United States is so lame, I can only conclude that deep down inside he knows that Britain reeks of pessimism, and British science fiction suffers from an air of futility. The real difference between Chris and myself is that, in his endearingly dour way, I think he rather enjoys the pessimism of his homeland and the futility of its fiction; whereas I insist on annoying people by complaining about it.*





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# Eric Brown
# Big Trouble Upstairs

I'm on the Barrier Reef pleasure 'plex, looking for a year-wife. Someone small and dark this time – Oriental maybe. The jacuzzi lagoon is foaming around me and my lover, a cute Kampuchean fluxer, when my handset goes *ber-leep*. I wade into the shallows, the kid big-eyed on my hip, and take the call.

"Sorry to come between you and your fun, Isabella." Massingberd stares up from the back of my hand, playing the chaperone. "But you're on."

The Spacer senses the goodbye and lays a soft cheek against my breast. I enter her head, tone down the love I've been promoting thus far, damp her synaptic fires.

"Give it me, Mass," I sigh.

"You're gonna love this one," he begins, and gives me a big wink.

There's a laser-slayer loose on the Carnival L5, wasting innocents like mad-crazy. The bastard zero'd the security team first, along with the mechanical defences – and he has a dozen workers imprisoned on the satellite, to pick off at his leisure.

"It's your kind of job, Is. You're going in there alone."

"Say, thanks..."

"A shuttle's on its way," he says, and signs off.

Soo-Lee clutches me. "Isabella..."

"There'll be other times," I soothe. But not with me ...Why do I do it – *why*? It was love at first sight. I felt that yearning, gut pang the second I set eyes on Soo-Lee a week back. She was picking scabs from her new hand-jack on the beach outside my villa. Of course, she wouldn't have given me a second glance, but I have *ability*.

The operation went wrong. It was *too* successful. Ten years ago I tested psi-positive and had the cut. Instead of coming out plain telepathic I emerged *mega*-telepathic. Which meant that, as well as being able to read minds, I had the power to control a subject's thoughts, make them do just whatever the hell I wanted. Pretty neat, okay.

I was the first of a new line.

We're a dozen now, closely supervised.

And I have this thing about kids. Whenever I see one I like I get in there and tamper, fix, and soon they're all gooey-eyed, eager.

This past week on the 'plex we made a striking couple: an anorexic, slit-eyed Enginegirl and a six-six eighteen-year-old Ruandan Watusi with scarified cheeks and dreads. That's me.

The love I promote is doomed, of course. I can't sustain that degree of adoration in a subject for long. The past few years I've instilled ersatz-love for the period of a six-month or one-year marriage contract – then withdrawn. It's kinder that way, to both parties. A year is long enough to live a lie, even when you're in love.

I dump Soo-Lee on the golden sand and sluice apathy around her frontal-lobe, and by the time I step into my villa she's beginning to wonder what she ever saw in me. Soon Isabella Manchester will be nothing more than a pleasant event in the memory of her childhood, and then not even that.

Massingberd knows. He was the only person I could bring myself to tell. He once asked me why I didn't turn my ability on myself. "Why don't you cure yourself, Is? Fix your head so you don't lust after these kids..."

It's no longer illegal, but oldsters like Mass have throwback morality.

"'Cos if it wasn't kids it'd be women or men. I'd be no better off, just the same. I need love, okay? I guess I'm insecure. I can't change what I am because of *why* I am –" And stopped there.

I didn't even know Massingberd well enough to tell him why I am.

"I need love and it's so easy for me to get it," I'd often say. "But how can that be love?"

Skip two hours and I'm aboard the shutt on autopilot, heading away from the plane of the ecliptic towards the Carnival L5. And mine's the only vessel going thisaway: all the other traffic is streaming Earthwards, sunlit specks corkscrewing down the gravity well like gene-data on a DNA helix.

From this far out the satellite is an oblate spheroid, a yuletide bauble set against the Pleiades. The lower hemisphere is in darkness – the maintenance section that keeps the whole show ticking. Above, the working end of the L5 is a fuzzy golden blur. Closer proximity provides resolution: I see avenues and arcades, rides and sideshows. One big fun city down there.

Massingberd's saying: "...carved up two hundred Japanese and American tourists before the emergency shuttles could get the rest out. There's around a dozen workers still in there, plus the killer –"

"You sure he didn't sneak out on a shuttle?"

"I had a 'head screening every ship that left, Is." He looks up at me solicitously. "Hey, you be careful, okay?"

The sentimental old bastard. "I'll be fine, Mass."

"I'm putting you through to the Director who's still in there –"

But he's cut off by a screenful of static. I shake my hand impatiently and the screen clears. Now another mugshot regards me – the big cartoon head, all ribbons and grin, of Minnie Mouse.

"I'm fouled up with an entertainment channel, Mass!" I yell. I'm approaching the L5 fast and I need the Director's talk-down. I can't hit destination cold. I'd be easy meat for the laser-slayer.

"Massingberd!" I cry again.

"Manchester?" Minnie Mouse asks.

"Huh?" I goggle.

"Are you reading, Manchester?" Minnie's fatuous grin belies the impatient tone.

"Reading," I say. "Who the hell...?"

"Director Maria Da Souza," Minnie says, a girl's voice muffled by latex.

"Why the fancy dress, Director?"

"You'll find out when you get here. Frankly, your surprise cannot equal mine. I was expecting a combat squad, at least. We have a maniac rampant up here, and they send me a..." She subvocalizes the rest, not for my ears, but I make out what might be, "...a witch-doctor."

I smile. "What's the score, Minnie?"

"I'll meet you at rim-lock twelve. The killer's somewhere on the far side of the complex. Could be anywhere within an area of twenty square kilometres. My workers are in the central plaza, in the dorms. They fled there when the shooting began..." I have the weird sensation of watching a kids' video crossed with the soundtrack of a cop show. "They're pinned down and can't get out."

"Have they tried?"

"You're joking, of course. The fire came from the far rim, and the dorms open onto the central concourse. It'd be an automatic death sentence for the first person who shows their face... You've got to get these people out –"

"My job is to get the killer," I tell her. "Then they're safe."

"In that case I hope you're well armed," Minnie says condescendingly.

I have the last laugh. "As a matter of fact I'm carrying not one single weapon," I say.

The Minnie head deprives me the satisfaction of seeing her face drop. She grins beatifically until I cut the link.

The shutt makes one hi-altitude orbit of the L5 and glides towards the docking rig in the underbelly, blindside of the killer. We contact with the delicacy of balloons kissing.

Seconds later I float out, cycle myself through the airlock and peer cautiously into the long, curving corridor. I scan for the killer's manic brainvibes, but the coast is clear. I move inside.

Minnie stands arms akimbo, awaiting me.

Maria Da Souza is tense and afraid, of course – but beneath this on a deeper level I access her identity. She's an intelligent, lonely kid, and in any other situation I'd like to get to know her better.

As it is –

"So here you are at last!" She kicks something towards me, a black rubber puddle sprouting ears.

"What the hell?"

"Get into it. Don't argue." She looks me up and down, appraising. "You're tall, but you'll fit at a stretch."

I pick it up. A Mickey suit. I step into the booties and pull the clinging rubber leggings over those of my onepiece. "Now, if you don't mind telling me what all this is about?" I could take time off scanning for the killer and read her, but I'm jumpy at the thought of being fried alive.

"This allows us greater freedom," Da Souza says. "The killer isn't potting cartoon characters – they're all robots. I was in the storeroom when the killing began. I saw what was going on and dug these out. They're the last we have in stock, from the days before actors were superseded by 'bots."

I stretch the torso over each shoulder and let go with a snap. Then I pull on the zippered head; my own bulges between the ears like a big egg. Mickey's never been so tall.

"You weren't kidding, were you?"

"Eh?" I'm having difficulty with the zipper.

"You aren't armed."

"Told you so."

"Then how the hell do you hope to kill the killer?"

I give her a big smile before fastening the zipper. "An old African custom," I say. "I'll *think* him dead..." Which isn't that far off the mark, minus the ethnic bit.

"Okay. Just one more thing," she says. "You gotta walk like the real Mickey. Like this."

I stare at her through the gauze where Mickey's tonsils should be. She's strutting up and down the corridor, waving her arms, twitching her ass. If only Massingberd could see us now.

"Your turn, Manchester."

So I strut my stuff before her, my elbows working invisible bellows. "Point your boots! Swing your tail! This has to be perfect, Manchester. If this bastard so much as suspects..."

She doesn't have to finish that line.

"Fine. You got it. Now where you want to go first?"

The thought of parading myself out there like a sitting duck – or rather mouse – gives me the heebies.

I quit wriggling and squat on my heels. The suit is tight and uncomfortable, squashing me short. "First, before I start risking my life – 'cos I don't want to be found dead in this fucking thing – first I want to know more about the killer. Like how he managed to waste an entire security team *and* blow the defence system?"

I keep a probe out for the killer. I have a range of just over a kilometre, though it's getting weak by then. We're quite alone at present.

"The security unit? The killer sprayed them with Procyon animalcules. They reduced the unit to slush one hour before the fireworks began."

"*Yech*! And the mechanical defences? The 'bots?"

"Deactivated beforehand. That should have set off an alarm in computer control, but that'd been fixed too."

"Whoever the killer is, he sure knows his stuff. Could it be someone who works here?"

She shrugs. "Why not? We employ nearly twenty thousand permanent staff."

"Most of them evacuated with the trippers? So that leaves only the dozen workers holed up in the dorms–"

"Plus the killer."

I think about it. "Has there been any shooting since

the dozen staff made it to safety?"

"No..." Da Souza is getting my drift.

"So perhaps...just *perhaps*, the killer is a worker. He or she hides with the others after the firing's through – providing an alibi."

"You think that likely?"

"At the moment anything's possible," I say.

Da Souza pushes herself from the wall with a practised rubber bounce. "Any more questions?"

"Yeah...how come a girl as young as you gets to be the Director of an outfit as big as this?"

That stops her in her tracks.

"How do you know how old I am?"

I posture cool. "I'm well informed," I tell her. "Well?"

She shrugs. "I work hard."

"You must be very talented."

She's suddenly uncomfortable, under the Minnie suit. I read that she was a solitary kid, bullied at school, whose only way of showing *them* was to succeed. But there's still something lacking, I read. Success isn't all.

I have the almost irresistable urge to go in there and help her out, ever so gently. But I restrain myself. This is neither the time or the place – and there's work to be done. Besides, I'm getting to the stage where I need *real* love, love that isn't forced.

"Lead the way," I say.

"Where to?"

"The workers' dorm, or thereabouts. I can do my stuff at long range."

She regards me. "Okay. You ready?"

We cake-walk into the open, beneath the arching crystal dome, along with hundreds of other cartoon characters. They're operating with an attention to duty that could be mistaken for macabre celebration of the surrounding carnage.

The fear I feel at our vulnerability is soon replaced by horror. Gobbets of human flesh occupy parks and gardens, tree-lined boulevards and exhibitions and fun-rides. Families lie in messily quartered sections, each chunk still grotesquely parcelled in the appropriate portion of clothing. Lower halves of once human beings sit in the seats of whirlers and spinners, still whirling and spinning in mechanical ignorance of their dead cargo.

And – this somehow makes the slaughter all the more tragic – robotic Mickeys and Minnies, Donalds and Plutos move from body to lasered body, patting dismembered heads, shaking lifeless hands, posing for pictures never to be taken beside the lacerated remains of Junior and Sis...

Da Souza continues galumphing along. She's seen it all before. I slow and stare aghast until a hear a "Psst!" and see a tiny gesture from Minnie up ahead. I quicken up and join her, strutting like a fool.

We leave the boulevard, cross a facsimile Wonderland and come to the croquet lawn. The Queen of Hearts strides around and calls imperiously: "Off with their heads!" And by some ghastly coincidence the Alice 'bot stands, hands on hips, her head removed by a freak sweep of the Killer's laser.

Da Souza ducks behind a hillock and points. "There," she says, indicating the entrance of a large rabbit burrow.



Illustrations by SMS

I close my eyes and concentrate on the workers' dorm beneath this make-believe world.

"What are you doing?" Da Souza asks in a whisper.

"Just casting dem ol' black spells," I jape.

I make out eleven minds down there. I go through them one by one, discarding each in turn as innocent. The killer isn't among them, of that I'm sure. All I read is fear and apprehension and, in a couple of cases, even hysteria. I'm looking for the bright brain-vibes of a maniac. This bunch is clean.

"You a telepath?" Da Souza asks in a small voice as I open my eyes and clear my head with a shake.

"Something like that," I tell her. "I thought you said there were a dozen workers? I scan only eleven."

"Over there." She points a white-gloved hand beyond the burrow to a hulking structure moored in a wide, simulacrum river, part of another facsimile. I recognize it. The steamboat from Huck Finn. "He didn't make it to the dorm," she says.

I concentrate, get nothing. There's a blank where the person should be. The boat's within range, and there's nothing wrong with my ability as I can still sense the eleven down the rabbit hole.

"There's no-one there," I say. "You sure – ?"

Then I glimpse movement.

Between balustrades I see a guy sitting on the steps of the upper deck. He's garbed in ancient costume: cloak, frilled shirt, tight breeches and big-buckled shoes. He's there, okay.

Fact remains – I scan nothing.

"I don't get this one bit," I murmur. "You see a guy over there? Or am I hallucinating ghosties?"

"Sure. That's him. He's an Andy, an A-grader. He plays the part of Dr Frankenstein in our latest spectacular."

"Thanks for telling me," I say. "You think I can scan cyber-junkboxes just like living minds?"

She gets the message and stays mute.

So our Dr Frankenstein's an Android? A tank-nurtured artificial human, playing the lead in the Gothic classic. I reckon Mary would just love that.

As for me, I'm suspicious. I have this aversion to Andys. Okay, so this guy's a citizen-grade Android from a reputable clinic, a fellow sentient with all the civil rights of you and me. But he still doesn't scan. I can't read Androids.

Prejudice, I know. And me of all people...

Nevertheless, I avoid them at parties.

"What do you know about this guy?" I ask. And I read her to ensure she's telling me all she knows.

"Well, he's an exceptionally talented actor. He applied for the role of the Doctor in the Frankenstein show. He auditioned well and got the part."

"You think he might be the killer?"

"Him?" She's surprised. "It has been known for Androids to go rogue, I suppose. But no...I don't think he's the killer. When we met he seemed very –"

"Okay, okay. I don't want a character reference. They say the Boston Strangler was a charmer."

"But what makes you think – ?"

I shrug. "A hunch, that's all. The eleven workers are clean, and here we have an unscannable Andy..."

"The laser fire did come from the other direction."

"Has it occurred to you that he might have got where he is now after he quit firing?" I say in a tone that suggests she shut up.

But why would an Andy go berserk like this, I ask myself.

I'm about to suggest we get the hell out in case the Andy is our man, when he sees us. He stands and stares across the river at the two cartoon mice no longer in role.

I take Da Souza by the paw and put the Duchess's cottage between us and the Android. "The best way to prove your beloved Andy innocent is if I grill him," I say, pulling off my left glove.

Most Androids are equipped with handsets, and Dr Frankenstein is no exception. His face, heavily made-up with age-lines and dark smudges beneath the eyes to suggest overwork, frowns out at me.

"Worry not, good Doctor. Your circuits have not fused." I unzip the Mickey head and tip it back. "Isabella Manchester. Tactical Telescan Unit. I'm here to save you people like a regular superhero."

The Android inclines his head, not taken with my humour. "I wondered when help might arrive." His tone is measured, cultivated. I almost understand why citizen-graders are so sought after at all the big social events.

"A few questions, if you please."

He inclines his noble head again.

So I ask him where he was when the firing began, what he saw of the slaughter, where does he suspect the killer is now? I try every trick in the book to make him incriminate himself, but he's not that dumb. He answers the questions with a slight Germanic accent, and I get the impression he's mocking me, as if he knows what I'm doing and wants me to know that he knows. He's pointedly civil in his acceptance of suspicion.

I thank him, assure him that I'll get the killer and quick, and cut the link. "Well?" Da Souza asks.

"What do you expect?" I say, frustrated. "That he admits he's the bad guy?"

"What did he say?"

"He was rehearsing when the killing began and made it as far as the showboat. He saw nothing of the massacre after that. He kept his tin-pot head down."

"You still think he did it?"

"I never said I did...But anything's possible."

"And now?" she asks. She's far from impressed by my uncertainty.

"Where did you say the last fire came from? Across the complex? Okay, so I'll make my way around the perimeter until I come within range. If I were you I'd remain here. I don't want your death on my *record*," I say, instead of *conscience*.

"I feel it my duty to accompany you," she says.

I nod. "Very well, then. Okay." I grab her hand and look for a route out of the Andy's possible line of fire.

She restrains me. "Remember the walk!"

So we be-bop into the open again, heading towards the multiple amphitheatres that scallop the perimeter of the complex. Our only comfort is the knowledge that we're indistinguishable from hundreds of other strutting cartoon characters.

At least, I *thought* we were –

The killer knows better.

The first bolt amputates Minnie's tail at the rump with a quick hiss and a coil of oily smoke. The second bolt misses me by a whisker and roasts a passing

Donald Duck at short order.

Da Souza drags me into the cover of a stage set and we crouch behind a chunk of lichened stone. I trace the bolts back to their source: across the complex beneath the far arch of the dome. I concentrate, but the distance defeats me.

"So the Android *can't* be the killer," Da Souza claims.

I laugh. "No? You sure about that? Think again, girl. In our disguises we were safe among all the other characters – then we're seen by the Andy. He's the only person who knows we're in this get-up."

"But the fire came from the opposite direction," she complains, reasonably.

"So the Andy has an accomplice, yes?"

That silences her.

Belatedly I realize we're on the set of Frankenstein. The scientist's lab is caught in flickers of electric blue, revealing eerie contraptions, improbable machines. The monster is on the slab, awaiting reanimation.

"And I don't know why we're still wearing these stupid things," I say, unzipping the head and flinging it back. Out there, the killer is busy frying every Mickey and Minnie in sight.

Da Souza says: "But why should he want to...?" And she makes a feeble gesture indicating the carnage on the deck.

"Slipped cog?" I suggest facetiously. I kick my suit away and it shivers against the wall like an animated jelly. "Take yours off," I tell her. "You're a marked mouse if you don't ditch that suit."

I waste no time and get through to Massingberd.

"Is! You okay?"

"I'm fine, Mass. Look, I need some info. You ready?" I look at Da Souza. She gives me the Andy's tag and classification, and I relay this to Mass with the rider: "Not that he's filed under that. Check wide. You know where to find me." I cut the link.

"You not out of that thing yet?" I stare at her. "Hey, you got something to hide?" Which, considering I have access to her head, is cruel.

I peep over masonry. I can't see the Andy or his boat from here, but his accomplice is still junking robot rodents. Bolts hail continuously from the far side of the complex. As if I needed confirmation...

"Come on!" I say.

She's out of the suit and staring defiantly at me.

The right side of her face is disfigured by a long scar more suited to Frankenstein's monster. Even in the flickering light I can see that it was once far worse, before plastic surgery. And it's still ugly. She's a nice kid, too – a small, dark Peruvian with skin like Aztec gold.

The scar's much deeper, of course. The surface damage is superficial; it's the scar inside her head that causes all the pain.

I give her my hand. "There must be a service hatch around here somewhere," I say. "We can approach the killer from below without being seen."

She leads me to a concealed swing door and we hit the underside. Less attention has been paid to illumination and glitz down here. Glo-tubes rationed to every ten metres stitch the gloom. The thunder of machinery is deafening. We jog along a vast, curving



gallery, mirror-image of the corridor top-side where I met Da Souza.

And I'm scanning all the time for the killer.

My hand bleeps and we stop to take the call.

"You're right, Is," Massingberd rapps. "The 'droid isn't on our files – under that tag. I came up with a likely candidate, though. A B-grade Andy manufactured in the Carnival clinic twenty-five years ago. It was employed for the first ten years as an extra in kids' films. It applied for up-grading several times but got nowhere. It was transferred to Disneyworld Shanghai, where it worked for another decade. Then – get this, Is – five years ago this 'droid was reported rogue. It dropped out and disappeared. We have a few reports on file as to its alleged activities during the next five years. Apparently it joined the outlawed Supremacy League, that crackpot schism of 'droids who demand the rule over humanity. It was involved in the bombings of '45, but was never apprehended. We have a number of reports that it underwent a programme of training as a cyber-surgeon so that the League could expand its up-grading of all the 'droids who rogued and joined them. We lost trace of it earlier this year, Is – around the time that your 'droid joined the Carnival outfit. It's quite feasible that it gave itself new retina-, finger- and voice-prints, doctored certificates and became the actor who played Dr Frankenstein. The 'droid returned home, Is –"

"To do a little counter-publicity for the largest manufacturers of B-grade Androids," I finish.

"You got it."

"I'll keep you posted, Mass."

We set off again.

Da Souza is murmuring to herself. "And he seemed so genuine at the audition..."

I ignore her and concentrate on the sudden flare of sentience that's just appeared a kilometre up-front. I've never before scanned anything like it. As we draw closer I realize that I'm not dealing with a normal human being. The thing up there overwhelms me with fear and pain and regret and guilt.

I go for the killer's identity, but I'm either too far away or the signal is weakening. I get the impression, then, that the killer is losing his strength, dying...

We're almost underneath the place where the maniac made his stand. To our right is a viewscreen, showing space and the quiet Earth. On our left we pass a pair of green swing doors, marked with hieroglyphs: the representation of a man and what might be an icicle.

It doesn't hit me for another five paces.

There's something in the head of the killer above us that has no right to be there... something that's keeping him alive...

I retrace my steps and regard the swing doors.

"Isabella?" Da Souza says.

"Christ," I murmur. "Jesus Christ..."

I push through the doors at a run.

"Isabella!" Da Souza rushes in after me.

We're in an operating theatre, and the only way it differs from the one in Dr Frankenstein's castle is in the modern fittings; the overhead halogens and the angle-poise operating table. They've both seen the same deed accomplished, one in fiction and one in fact.

I move towards a green, vertical tank as if in a trance.

"Isabella?" Da Souza is staring at me. "Didn't you know? We brought him up here years ago, equipped this place for when the time is right to bring him back to –"

I open the tank and it's empty.

"Where is he?" she screams at me as I run from the theatre and through the nearest hatch to the upper hemisphere.

I've never really credited Androids with any of the more complex human emotions, like love or hate...

Or even irony.

By playing his role of Dr Frankenstein to the full, this Andy has proved me wrong.

Back in the sixties of the last century, the king of the greatest entertainment industry on Earth was corpsicled. Put on ice and stacked away until such time as his cancer could be fixed. And now...

Now Walt stands on the balcony of a fairytale castle. Ten metres separate him from where I crouch on the gallery that circles the complex. He rests his weight on a laser-rifle, crutchlike, and sways. His shaven head bulges at the left temple with a dark mass like some morbid extra-cranial tumour: it's a cyber-auxiliary, wired in there by the Android. It's this that is powering him, that motivated him to commit the slaying of the innocents. He's so feeble now, so near death a second time, that it has little control over his body or his mind. For the first time since his resurrection, he is himself.

He sees me and smiles sadly.

His skin, blanched with a hundred years of death, is puckered and loose, maggotlike. He is barely conscious, yet a flicker of tragic awareness moves within him. The chemical that is keeping him alive is almost spent.

"Is this a nightmare?" he asks in a voice so frail it barely reaches me.

"A dream," I say.

"Where am I?" I read his lips. "In Hell?"

I almost reply: "In your Heaven, Walt," but stop myself.

I follow his gaze to the deck, as he surveys the carnage of his own doing.

"Watch out!" Da Souza appears beside me and drags me to the ground. Walt is making one last feeble attempt to lift and aim the laser; it wavers in our direction. I can read in his eyes that he has no desire to kill us, but the choice is not his. The Frankenstein Android controls the cyber-auxiliary.

I close my eyes.

In the nightmare of Walt's failing brain I open the floodgates of anger. I motivate him into action, give him the will to revenge himself.

And while I'm doing this I realize something. How can I ever again use my ability to induce love after using it to promote so much hate?

Da Souza clutches my arm. "What – ?"

I concentrate. "Just call it black magic, Maria." And as I speak, Walt swings his laser-rifle, the desire for revenge overcoming the Android's final command.

He cries out and fires.

The showboat disintegrates in a million shards of synthi-timber, and Dr Frankenstein explodes like a grenade in a brilliant white starburst.

Walt lets the laser fall and slips quietly into his

second death, smiling with induced euphoria all the way.

Three hours later and we're surfing down the helix of the gravity-well. Back on the L5, Walt is being returned to ice, the slaughter mopped up.

I break the silence. "Were you orphaned, Maria?" Gently.

She looks at me, suspicious. "How do you know?"

I reach out and touch her head. "Big Trouble Upstairs," I say. Then: "We're very much alike, you and me."

She gives me the story that I know already, but it helps for her to talk about it. Her mother died when she was ten and she was taken from her father following the attack that left her scarred. "And you?" she asks "Were you orphaned?"

"Something like that –" And stop.

My parents' tribe was hungry and poor. I was their third and youngest daughter, and I checked out psi-positive. A hundred thousand credits bought a lot of cattle, back then.

So the Telescan Unit wasn't exactly slave labour...

But try telling that to a lonely nine year-old.

"Perhaps you'd like to talk about it?" Maria asks, with affection.

Get that –

*Genuine affection.*

I smile. "I think perhaps I might," I say.

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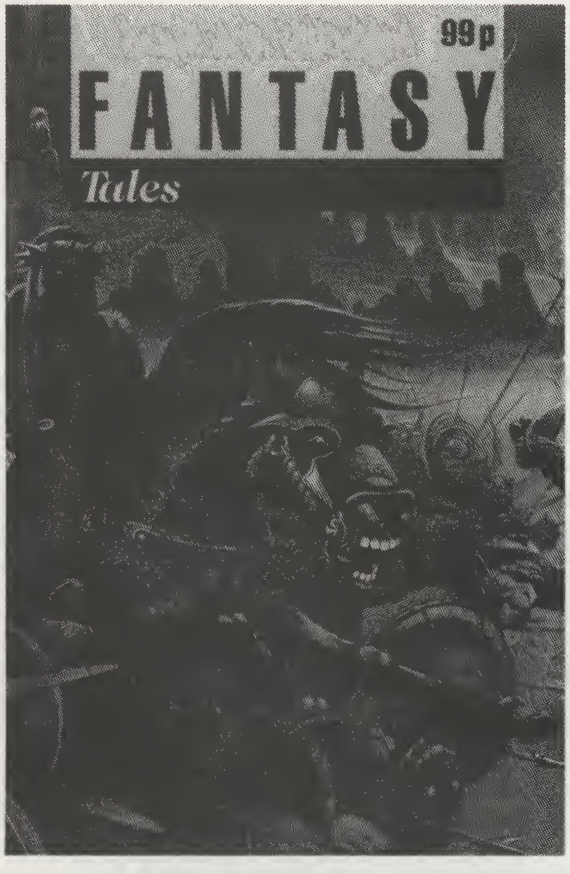
**Eric Brown**, born in 1960, is the most popular new British sf writer that *Interzone* has discovered in the past year or so (see the readers' poll results elsewhere in this issue). He has recently completed a children's novel, and is now engaged on a new batch of short stories with which he hopes to break into American markets.

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## BACK ISSUES

**Please note that issues 1, 5 and 7 of *Interzone* are now out of print – and some of the other early issues are in short supply. If you wish to order please hurry (prices on page 3).**






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# Johnny Black
# The Agony of Suburban Knowledge

The door closed with a tiny click. As he lay there in a dream, Slattery imagined he heard one of them calling his name from down the hall.

He made the effort, and forced himself back to consciousness just in time to see the red tail lights of their vehicle disappear into the veil of mist at the end of the street.

The window was jammed and he pressed his face against the pane, bending the cold tip of his nose, flattening his cheeks, in an attempt to catch the final fading glow of red. It was useless. There was nothing to see, and he was left with only the vaguest of memories as he slumped back down onto the covers of his divan bed.

The worst of it was, he knew what they had been doing, where they had come from, where they were now going.

"I know," he thought to himself, "but I don't really know." He lay for a long time with the absurd thought running loose inside him and tried to remember what had happened. Only fragments remained and they were dissolving into nothing as the moments passed.

An unconscious urge drove him, still dressed in only his pyjama top, to cross the room and, finding a nylon-tipped pen, he began to write on the face of the ace of hearts the few details he seemed to remember of the incident. The ace was lying upturned, away from the rest of the pack, in the centre of the circular table. "I knew that table," he thought to himself, and then wondered what he had meant.

In his compulsively neat, tiny script, he covered the face of the card with half-recalled fragments. "Lights... they came in slowly through the door ... as if they belonged here... tall, thin, bony... heard them laughing but their faces never changed... I could have moved but I didn't... one of them sat on the bed and stroked my hand... was there music echoing in the hall... my eyes would not blink... they gave me the drug... bitter..."

He paused and ran his tongue around his lips, but there was no aftertaste. He put down the pen, crossed to the mirror and looked, turning his head, out of the corners of his eyes. Nothing.

As he settled at the table again he noticed that his writing was deteriorating into an almost illegible scrawl. Nevertheless, he continued until the card was covered, then searched through the pack until he found the ace of diamonds.

The words came more slowly now. "I think they were maybe dancing... all the spiders were eating their babies... they said they were angels... said they were from the government... one of them was whistling behind the door... I know all about these things... the man with the feathered boots is a God of the Maya..."

Much later, staring at the ace of diamonds, he knew that the words were nonsense. Turning back to the ace of hearts, it too seemed to have been written by someone he barely knew. "I know... I know," he told himself.

Two hours later, he was rocking gently from side to side on the uneven legs of the chair, shuffling the cards, now and again catching sight of the pair of aces, when a sharp knock came at the door. He seemed to be watching himself get up and walk to the door.

"Morning," said the postman. "One parcel. Needs a signature. Two letters."

"I know," replied Slattery. "The letters are from people I've never met. The parcel, from my sister in Holland. One of the letters is from an elderly man in Bridgenorth who has found a guide book I lost two years ago and, if I send him postage, he will return the book. The other letter..."

"You all right, sir?" asked the postman, a look of concern crossing his features.

"Yes. Does it seem mad, me telling you all these things which I can't possibly know? Come right in, and we'll open the letters together. I'll show you." Slattery threw the door wide open, but the little man turned away.

"I'd better be off then," he called out with forced cheerfulness.

"Well, yes..." Slattery watched him walk, a little faster than usual, along the hall and out of sight. For a long time he stood in his doorway, conscious of seeing everything from two viewpoints – a physical one located somewhere behind his eyes and a new one that wasn't anywhere inside his body. It observed with detachment and it seemed to know what was going on.

He knew he should have been cautious. It was foolish to upset people with his new knowledge. He began looking round the flat for signs that might prove they had visited, when an eerie thought came to him. He realized he could no longer remember them. All he remembered was that he had had a memory of them. He remembered the memory, not the event.

He almost knocked the chair over in his haste to retrieve the two aces from the pack but, when he found them, it was difficult to distinguish them from

the aces of spades and clubs. Eventually he sorted them out and began to wonder why he had wanted them. Their surfaces were marked with some kind of hieroglyphics, or maybe it was Persian script, or Chinese. "I know what this is," he insisted to himself. "This is my memory of having written about my memory." He scrutinized the cards in minute detail. "Or is it just my writing about my memory?"

For a moment, he wished he was going mad, but he knew that was not so. No, the unbearable burden they had left him was infinite knowledge. The key to all the universes, down through all the ages, past and future, all the latticework of interlocking relative dimensions. The key was inside his head. He touched his temple. "I know," he said, finding the thought unbearable.

He let his head slump down onto the tabletop and he knew the age of the walnut from which it was cut. He knew not only the shape, but the molecular structure of the leaves of the tree. He knew how the tree felt when it rained. He knew the name by which a butterfly thought of itself—a butterfly which, he knew, had once been reflected in a raindrop caught on the leaf of the tree. He knew the sons of the woodcutter who hacked the tree down.

A tear squeezed itself from his eye, ran over the bridge of his nose and joined with another tear in his other eye, before running down his cheek and falling onto the tabletop. "I know what this is," he thought. "This is the pain of knowing."

The next thought was the one which caused him to shiver. "And this is the pain of not remembering."

It was true.

As the painful days dwindled down, his knowledge was confirmed. If he touched an object, he knew it intimately, past, present and future. It was as if every event in the history of the universe had left its impression on every material object. And worse, the information was there in immaterial things too. It was recorded in rays of sunlight. It came to him on voices, through music, on electromagnetic waves from his television set.

If a friend mentioned a name, or a place or an event, Slattery found himself bursting with logically filed data, all of it relevant, all of it useful, much of it terrifying. But moments later, the memories began to fade and, soon, if he did not make copious notes, it was all gone.

He lost his dearest friend, a victim of the fear of knowledge. They had been chatting casually on the phone, Slattery had been striving to limit himself to polite comments, yes and no, nothing elaborate, nothing revealing.

"I must introduce you to Lesley," said his friend Green. "She's the sweetest girl and I just met her last night..."

"She fell onto the rails of the Central Line not long after you kissed her goodnight," said Slattery, unable to contain himself, unable to bring a trace of the emotion he felt into his voice. "She was horribly mutilated and died on her way to hospital. The ambulance driver feels guilty. He's thinking of changing to a job with a lower stress factor. It's a shame. She really liked you too."

In the silence that suddenly gripped the other end of the line, Slattery knew that, although he was perfectly right in every detail, he should have said nothing. But how could he? How could he remain silent, crushed under the weight of so much agonizing truth? He and Green never spoke again.

However, left to himself, with no outside stimuli, Slattery was able to find occasional moments of vacant relief. He learned how to still his knowledge, or perhaps it was a naturally still thing of itself, only spurred into grim, unrelenting life by external influences. Sometimes he imagined he heard a whistling, reedy melody from out in the hall, and wondered if it meant they had come back, but couldn't remember who "they" might be. Still, the whistling brought him a little solace.

As he came to know his room in microscopic, penetrating detail, he began to feel at home there. Although such immediate information could not be totally excluded, he eventually found it comforting, reassuring, and the people he met in his knowledge of the room became firm friends whom he could visit again and again, at any moment of their lives and, if he kept accurate notes, he would always know how they would react, what they would be saying, what they would be doing. They replaced the lost friends of here and now.

Within the sphere of this knowledge, he met again his long-dead mother, by the simple act of knowing all there was to know about the ornate, gilt mirror which was the only object he had inherited from her. The chains of knowledge stretched endlessly and he was able to follow them back and forward through time. By knowing the technician who designed his midi system, Slattery came to know that man's wife. And through her he found a route to one of her school friends, which led to her father, a blacksmith, then back to his mother, to the foal she had bought from a gypsy at Newmarket, back through generations of horses until he found a messenger riding across the Alps, carrying an urgent summons to the house of Leonardo Da Vinci.

All of these things were within Slattery, and they were as true to him as the world outside his door. The paths of knowledge were infinite and, having once found Da Vinci, Slattery diverted himself by seeking other routes back to that same moment in the great man's life.

Once, just once, he inadvertently touched the onyx stone of a ring he had been given when he was a young man. The touch made him giddy, sent him whirling, reeling, following a twisting path back to the beginning of time, back into the void, back into the compressed matter that existed in the heart of the universes before time and space erupted. He stayed there a while, enjoying the partial relief that arose from knowing that there was now only a future. No past to fear.

He waited a while in case God might appear, then returned to his room. Much as he had been amused by the journey, he felt no serious inclination to visit the other end of time, quite convinced that it could be no different.

From time to time he played solitaire. Shuffling the pack produced a rippling sensation within him as touching each card opened up new pathways which closed with the next movement of the pack.

He began to lose track of the world outside. The postman still called, but Slattery invariably knew the contents of the letters and felt no need to open them, no desire to answer them.

He changed the message on his telephone answering device and left it permanently switched on. "Hello. I know why you have called. There is no need to leave a message but you may do so if you prefer. Yes, I'm still feeding myself. Thank you." From time to time, out of long habit, he rewound the tape, but never listened to the messages. Eventually the calls all but stopped coming.

Life without friends was simpler.

He found that he could cope with the essential mechanics of life – the shopping, cleaning his flat, collecting his unemployment benefit – if he kept a tight rein on himself, biting his tongue if he was tempted to say too much. Even so, he was subjected to many strange looks, which he found perfectly understandable. He knew that they considered him mad, and that they were quite reasonably afraid of him. A few careless words from Slattery could upset the illusory order by which they regulated their lives.

Once, standing in a queue in the supermarket, the hand of the woman in front of him brushed against his. It was too much, and he succumbed to an uncontrollable urge to tell her, in a loud voice, everything she and her lover had done in a recent long night of lovemaking while her husband was out of town. He started with details of how he undressed her, every item of lace and silk she was wearing.

The woman's mouth fell open and her purse clunked down onto the checkout desk. Slattery continued mercilessly detailing each increasingly intimate caress and erotic act until the woman hit him with exactly the ferocity he had known she would. He stopped and said, "I do beg your pardon."

He left the queue, holding his stinging cheek, and laughing as he had not done in some long time.

Later that evening, in a fit of black depression, he changed the message on his answering machine once more.

At five forty-five on October 10, 1979, he left his room and walked down to the end of his street, where he engaged a complete stranger in a brief conversation.

Taking the pack of cards from his top pocket, he shuffled them, smiled just a flicker, and said the unfortunate stranger, "Pick a card. Any card." At first the stranger smiled indulgently at him then, after a moment or two of mildly embarrassed hesitation, picked a card.

Next, Slattery stepped backwards off the pavement into the path of an oncoming red Number 10 bus. The card, a red ten of hearts, was covered in Slattery's writing.

"Be advised, Mr Lawrenson, that I have an allergy to sodium pentathol. My injuries will not kill me. I will be despatched beyond these agonies as a result of complications caused by the incorrect administration of sodium pentathol. You will inform the hospital of my allergy, but the drug will nevertheless be administered. Death's like that. My dearest wish, since that fateful night some years ago which is now even less than the memory of a memory, has been that you would pick a different card. Knowledge has been of no use to me, here in the suburbs."

Slattery did one more thing before death welcomed him, exactly as he had predicted on the ten of hearts. He regained consciousness, under the influence of the drug, and told the surgeon, "I heard them call my name."

The surgeon spoke soothingly to him and he faded from life, thinking he could hear that whistling, reedy melody out in the hall. He was buried at public expense and, sometime later, his body was stolen from the coffin.

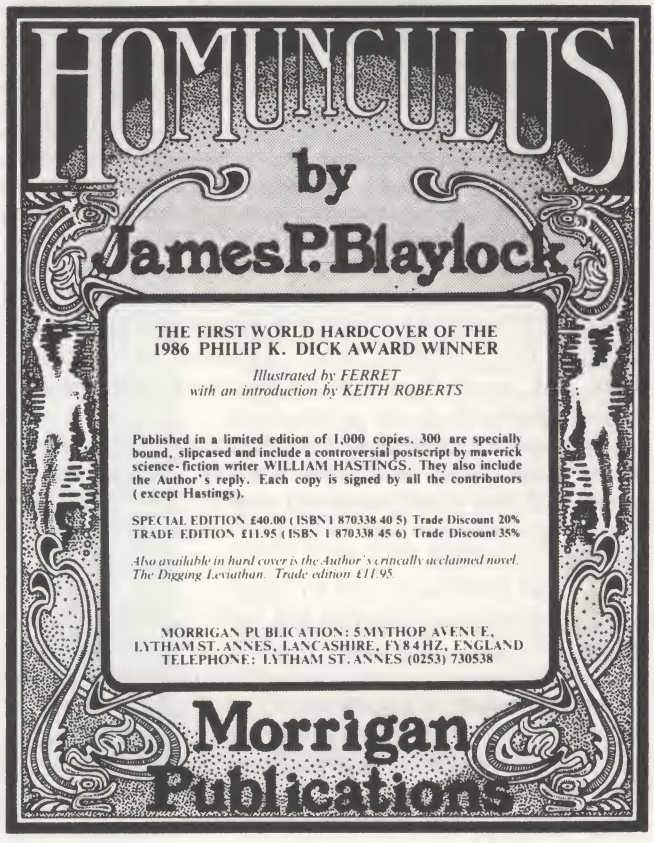
It was almost a month before his sister, his only relative, called on the telephone, expecting to be greeted by the usual enigmatic message. Instead, she found the new one.

"I know it isn't possible but, if you're calling before 5.45pm on October 10th, please get in touch with a Mr Lawrenson and ask him not to go anywhere near the corner of Rowney Avenue on October 10." He repeated Lawrenson's phone number several times and concluded the message with the words, "I know it isn't possible, but well, you know..."

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**Johnny Black** was born in Edinburgh in 1949. His short stories have appeared in *Extro*, *Penthouse* and elsewhere, and he has contributed poetry to various small Scottish magazines. He also has two unpublished sf novels currently with an agent. He now lives in Wiltshire and works as a freelance journalist.

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# The War Bores

## Charles Platt

When Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* was published thirty years ago, it did more than merely create controversy. In some circles, it caused outrage.

But that was in 1959. If *Starship Troopers* was published for the first time now, it would be greeted with barely a murmur of dissent. Right-wing American novels of space warfare have become so common as to constitute a whole category in themselves.

Before *Starship Troopers*, science fiction tended not to contain overt political sermons or hard-core militarism. There were heroic tales involving simple, violent solutions to social problems, but writers stopped short of real propaganda.

No more. Today, it is clear that most writers of "hard" science fiction are politically conservative and proud of it. By comparison, there are pitifully few high-tech writers with anything resembling a left-wing or pacifist orientation.

How few? Personally, I can only find four really well-known names. First, of course, is Arthur C. Clarke, whose articles and stories portraying space travel as a concept to unify humanity seem somewhat quaint in an age of anti-satellite weapons and SDI.

Second, there's Harry Harrison, whose action-adventures often carry an implicit pacifist message, and whose *Bill, the Galactic Hero* ridiculed the whole space-war school.

Then there's Joe Haldeman, a Vietnam veteran whose wounds from a .50 calibre machine-gun bullet are an everyday reminder of what infantry warfare is really all about. Having been awarded a purple heart, Haldeman nevertheless writes sceptically about heroism.

Lastly, I include Frederik Pohl, who has argued long and hard for international peace and understanding, and has consistently opposed aggressive American foreign policy.

To find other high-tech humanitarians, one almost has to go back to H.G. Wells. Meanwhile, on the other side, there's a whole army of patriots promoting rugged individualism, the downfall of socialism, and peace through superior firepower. These "war bores," as I tend to think of them, picked up where Heinlein left off. They include Jerry Pournelle, Gordon R. Dickson, the late H. Beam Piper, Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, Janet Morris, Keith Laumer, James P. Hogan, and David Drake. People who buy Baen Books (I don't) will be able to add another dozen authors to this list, and subscribers to *Analog* can surely come up with many more – which reminds me to include the high-tech editors, too: John W. Campbell (who once advocated slavery as a "natural" social system in one of his editorials), Ben Bova, Stanley Schmidt, and James Baen, every one of them a steadfast opponent of anything remotely resembling socialist or pacifist thinking.

But perhaps I should define my terms a little more precisely, and also state my own bias. The kind of American science fiction I'm complaining about is typically a space-exploration story which carries an explicit conservative message. The least offensive version goes something like, "Here in the United States in the twentieth century, we've gotten complacent and lazy, accustomed to being looked after and taken care of, to the point where welfare payments have created a permanent underclass of unproductive drones. Well, up on the High Frontier, buddy, we're going to have a society based on individual achievement, where everyone will have to pull his weight." Which means, I guess, that if you move in with the colonists at L5, you shouldn't expect free medical care, a pension plan, or specific toilet facilities for the disabled.

Jerry Pournelle has promoted this outlook in several books. For instance, in the words of a space recruiting officer in *Exiles to Glory*: "You've been brought up to think somebody will take care of you. Social security, National Health Plan, Federal Burial Insurance... And I'm talking about a place where it's all up to you, where you take care of yourself because nobody's going to do it for you. I guess that can be scary to modern kids."

This rugged, pioneer spirit does have some virtues. It emphasizes individual responsibility and freedom of thought, and it's a timely antidote to apathy. Most important, it keeps alive the very important idea that we are not necessarily trapped here on the surface of our planet. At the same time, though, it has little to tell us about altruism and compassion, and it is intolerant of dissenting views. Worse, it conveniently ignores annoying human problems such as old age, disease, and disability.

The more pernicious forms of right-wing science fiction go considerably further, developing the military implications of rugged individualism into a message which, as I understand it, goes something like this:

"There are a lot of people out there who are philosophically opposed to a social system that places a high premium of individual liberty. Historically speaking, any nation with superior military technology and/or a better trained militia will tend to prevail over less militaristic nations. Bearing this in mind, we'd be wise to arm ourselves and, if necessary, take clandestine action against nations that threaten the survival of our freedom."

In the purest form of this fiction, military power does not remain a mere means to an end, but becomes a glorified end in itself. David Drake, in particular, has expressed admiration for *any* army that displays skill, heroism, and a high esprit-de-corps – which is to say, high efficiency and expertise in killing people. Drake sometimes wears a swastika belt buckle, not because he's a neo-Nazi, but because he feels sincere admiration for the honour and heroism of stormtroopers.

This sort of outlook has its place – in *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, for instance. The question is why it should prevail in science fiction. Our field, after all, often emphasizes the inevitability of change and progress. High-tech writers eagerly postulate exciting new gadgets and super-science that strains one's credulity. And yet, at the same time, they behave as if *social* progress is out of the question. Because there always has been war, they say, there always will be war. Our present condition of civilized peace in the West is portrayed as a chimera; soon we'll be back to barbarism-as-usual. This, they say, may be regrettable, but

is unavoidable, and even somehow *necessary*, as if a nonviolent world of negotiations and reasonableness would be a betrayal of our feisty human spirit.

Most high-tech writers are equally reluctant to allow any progress in our political systems. They either reject politics altogether, in a nostalgic retreat to the old "frontier spirit"; or they embrace the simplest kind of libertarianism; or they depict galactic empires run on feudal, monarchic, or military lines, as if it seems likely that we will regress to a politically primitive level at the same time that we become more technologically sophisticated.

Personally, I enjoy science fiction that treats science seriously and gets all the facts right. I grew up with books such as Clarke's *A Fall of Moondust* or Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity*. My father was an engineer, and I went to Cambridge as a maths student. But I think of my politics as leaning more toward left than right, and I find weapons mildly revolting – they are designed, after all, to cause maximum destruction of our own species, which should be an inherently abhorrent concept.

Consequently, there's very little high-tech science fiction that I can enjoy. Stories of laser-toting space cadets in search of "maturity" embarrass me in their shallowness. Worse, I see them as betrayals of real human truths: that maturity is a matter of learning to understand and tolerate other people, rather than learning how to kill them; that men fight more often from fear than heroism; and that an army is basically a system for gutting the human spirit.

I don't understand why such stories have become the norm in high-tech sf. Of the few non-militaristic authors I listed earlier, only Frederik Pohl is still actively producing real-world, near-future fiction that combines moderate, centrist politics with a realistic grasp of science and technology. His work has shown steady progress away from easy answers demanded by simply plots of category fiction, toward the conviction that debate and compromise are the real tools we should be using to ensure peace and an end to the ridiculous waste of money on weapons. Pohl is by no means naïve; his novel *Jem*, for instance, is a ruthless study of the uglier aspects of human nature. But even when he is most cynical, there is still idealism in his work. His novel *The Years of the City* is a deeply felt depiction of how our social systems could be reformed, despite venality and corruption in government. It is not an especially lively novel, but it is mature and constructive. More recently, his *Chernobyl* contains an implicit message cautioning against our indiscriminate use of nuclear power.

I wish more high-tech science-fiction writers could follow Pohl's example and turn away from their diehard, life-denying dramas of futuristic warfare. They would not necessarily lose their readers; Pohl's own work sells well enough. On the other hand, of course, it's harder to create a scenario in which good and evil are not reduced to primitive extremes. It's harder to devise a plot in which technology is double-edged, creating problems at the same time that it solves them. And it's *much* harder to maintain narrative tension when a lone here is shown to be less effective than a cooperating group, and there are no huge explosions or bloody massacres to titillate the teenage reader.

In fact, without these attention-getting gimmicks, I doubt that most high-tech science-fiction writers would know how to sustain a story. In place of heroism and hardware they would have to concern themselves with human values, which they seem unwilling even to acknowledge, let alone portray. A pity; for in literature, as in life, human attributes are worth more than primitive aggression, and if we are ever to make real social progress, we need to shed our violent traits rather than glorify them.

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# Small World with Far Horizons

## Brian Stableford

The call has recently gone out for papers to be presented at the tenth **International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts**, which will take place at the Fort Lauderdale Airport Hilton from the 15th to the 19th of March, 1989. The organizers hope that it will be an auspicious occasion, representing a kind of coming-of-age for fantasy scholarship, and it certainly seems that the conference will in the future be the flagship of that cause. No area of scholarship can really be considered to have established itself until it has its own arena of debate, where the members of a scattered community of interest can come together to share the bread and circuses of the intellect.

The early ICFAs were sponsored by the mother of the late fantasy writer **Thomas Burnett Swann** as a memorial to her son, whose support helped the parent organization, IAFA, find its feet. It is entirely appopriate, however, that the ten-year-old conference should now be both self-supporting and flourishing. The ICFA is by far the largest gathering of its kind, and IAFA has recently distributed the first issue of its own journal.

The fantastic aspects of the world of academic conferences have already been exposed by David Lodge's ironic grail romance *Small World*, so it will come as no surprise to anyone to learn that the ICFA is an affair unrivalled in fabulous surreality. Though it cannot compare in size with such mammoth affairs as the MLA Conference it has little difficulty outstripping its rivals in breadth. The literature in review extends from Homeric epics and Chaucerian tales to magic realism and cyberpunk. The art historians and anthropologists who deal with fantastic visual representations explore a range which is even greater, both temporally and culturally. The ninth conference featured among its 171 papers such delights as a paper on "Toys as Fantasy" by the Yorkshire-born artist **John Pearson**, and Roger Schlobin's modest claim to have discovered a new Jungian archetype (the "Femivore"); while special guest **Donna Cox** offered examples of what could be accomplished by "Renaissance teams" of artists and scientists working with computer graphics to put data into innovative visual forms.

Because of its links with the sf community the ICFA usually brings academics into rather more intimate contact with the objects of their study than is usual at conferences. In 1988 the star guests were **Peter Beagle** and **Harlan Ellison**, and their presence called forth brave souls to present numerous papers on their work. The two men are as different in person as they are when one meets them on the page – Beagle stylish and softly-spoken; Ellison sharp and sparkling, forever fervent with righteous wrath – but each in his own way must have terrified the people who set out to dissect their prose. The tenth conference will feature **Robert Silverberg**, **Orson Scott Card** and **Joe Haldeman** as well as hardy perennial **Brian Aldiss** (who, as a regular attendee, may well have heard more academic papers on his work than any other living author.)

The steady growth of academic interest in sf and fantasy has been regarded with some slight suspicion by writers and fans who fear that its influence might be baleful. It has been argued that many living American writers awarded elite status within the groves of academe have been seduced into writing mainly for the academic audience, and some people fear that sf

writers flattered by academic attention might increasingly be led to fill their work with the things which academics are most willing to compliment. There has been little sign of any such trend so far, partly because sf and fantasy are so peripheral in the academic field that academic approval exerts very little economic force, and partly because the sheer variety of viewpoints and concerns on display at the ICFA does not encourage the emergence of any kind of consensus about what is properly to be admired in sf and fantasy.

The relationship between sf writers and academics has not been without its tensions during these last ten years. The academics who have become interested in sf and fantasy are suspected of cynically drifting with tides of fashion, hooking their careers to the coat-tails of popular genres while having little real understanding of the variety of genre materials or of the economic and cultural context in which the label is applied. Harlan Ellison's fiery speech in 1988, entitled "Condemned to the Gulag," protested against the iniquities of labelling and pigeon-holing which prevent genre writers being treated as individuals.

Ellison conceded, though, that he had been converted to the view that some academic analyses were capable of insight after hearing **Peter Malekin** of the University of Durham – one of the few British critics who regularly makes the trip to the ICFA – speak about his work. And it is indeed the case that those who present papers at the ICFA are mostly people who clearly do have a genuine enthusiasm and affection for the objects of their study. There are, in any case, enough non-academics on hand to ensure that matters never get bogged down in the slough of solemnity or transfixed by the freezing fog of pomposity which too often blight academic affairs. In 1988 editor **David Hartwell** took a leading role in founding the Lord Ruthven Society for the promotion and encouragement of literary vampires – a worthy cause by anyone's standards.

As might be expected, the ICFA has been influenced by the pattern of sf conventions as well as the norms of academic conference life. Its guest writers are formed into panels to discuss topics which would not be out of place at a convention, and authors are also invited to read from their work. There are, inevitably, parties in the evenings; some of those at the ninth conference were greatly enlivened by the performing skills of writers **Tom Maddox** and Peter Beagle – the former a fine guitarist, the latter singing his own deft and witty compositions. Contemplating the idea in the abstract, one might easily suppose that the hybrid obtained by crossing an sf convention with an academic conference would be a misshapen monster, but in fact it is not. The conviviality works to the advantage of those whose interest is in intellectual inquiry as well as those who need some light relief from talk of archetypes and hermeneutics, while guest authors can occasionally be tempted to produce academic papers themselves, just for the fun of it, as **Sharon Baker** did in 1988.

The provisional schedules for the tenth conference promise sessions on "Chaos Theory and SF/Fantasy," "Corporation and Company as a Source of Horror," "The Fantastic Invasion of Prime Time TV" and many other intriguing headings which will undoubtedly confront the attendees with a series of difficult choices (five tracks run simultaneously, all competing with the hotel pool and the Florida sun). Attendance will surely break previous records, and the small world of fantasy scholarship will look forward to a future of broadening opportunities.


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# Charles Stross
# In the DreamTime

She had hazelnut eyes as dead as mud at the bottom of a pool. She seemed to wear a long dress; black, backless, with elbow-length gloves. The gloves were there to give her a measure of psychological protection; so was the tiny drug pump buried in her skull. She looked caucasian, which was stylish because caucasians were rare – real ones, that is – and she had long black hair. She looked lonely and vulnerable, by design, which was what she wanted because it was good for business. She turned her back on me alluringly. I saw eighteen puckered scars like dimples parading down her back; nine to each side of her spine. I ignored her and headed for the bar.

"Hey," she said. "You –"

I brushed against her. Pink froth flowed up the side of her glass, lapped over the edge; droplets ran down her costume like molten rubies, refusing to sink in. I ignored this and carried on. A wide shoulder blocked my path. I paused.

"Wait," she said.

She saw me: the Toad. A shock of dark hair over a broad, vaguely amphibian face with washed-out eyes. A short, squat body with a slight paunch; naked from the waist up, except for the black silk sleeve of a neural shield. That's how I appeared to her. We were both in a place called the Terminal Inn, an indifferent pun on its purpose. Somewhere beyond this dusty pavilion the DreamTime began, a desert of degraded information that extended for a subjective infinity. Within the pavilion the floor was carpeted in archaic, faded Persian weavings of bewildering calligraphic ancestry and considerable complexity; illumination came from a dimly powered hologram of Luna before it had been Expanded to form the substrate for the DreamTime. Ghost lights hung over the bar, and over old Adolf. Adolf presented himself as a withered, unbelievable corpse. Eccentric, to say the least.

The scene was crowded with exotics, tourists, shadowy dreamworkers. It was crowded and humid and focused on me and this person who faced my back. Droplets of her drink glared up at me accusingly from the floor, trying to climb the hem of her gown in a vain attempt to rejoin their parent mindmass in the glass. "Who are you?" she asked. "You spilled my drink."

"I'll buy you another," I offered. Pinprick pupils, armed with the psychotic languor of one who hired out her nervous system by the hour, regarded me.

"You're on," she said.

She reached the bar ahead of me. Beautifully curved shoulders mocked me from above two neat rows of puckered dimples with white, stellate cores. The ghost wind howled into the DreamTime outside the tent, and the night was still young. In this place the night was forever.

I stayed with her a while, out of curiosity.

"You are...?" I asked.

"I'm Terry," she said disinterestedly. Socially acceptable to play it cool, cool as liquid helium.

"Yes," I said, as if it was an observation of some not-very-relevant phenomenon. "I'm the Toad," which was nearly a lie. A green lamp flashed in the twilight, twisting like the synthetic thermal image of a newly-hanged felon. Spots and coils of verdancy stained Terry's features.

"What do you want tonight?" she asked.

Trap: innocent question or sales pitch? I decided to assume the former and answered truthfully. "I'm looking for a customer," I said.

"You a grave robber?" she asked. I shrugged.

"Are you a prostitute?" Not intentionally, her eyes seemed to say. I need the drug pump to keep me happy, I need to feel helpless to keep out of things that might hurt me; you should mind your own business. "Maybe we can spot for each other..." I ventured.

"I send business your way," she said, "if I should happen to see you."

As cold as pond-water; what had I expected? The conversation died, and then she was gone. Just another shape in the gloom. I sighed and persuaded myself not to look out for her; it would only hurt if I tried to involve myself.

Later, in another place, Terry had a customer.

"Hey, Honey," ran his line; "want to see my collection of engrams?" She did; it was one way of staying alive, one way of keeping body and soul apart. The customer was rich. He used a mobility-assist in the form of an antique type of transport called a Ford Zodiac. The silver-and-ivory limousine swung away from the tent, gravel crunching ephemerally beneath whitewall tyres. Windscreen wipers flicked slowly under the harsh geometric tribal scars of the illusory man-in-the-moon. A faint puttering of noxious vapour writhed away into the night, drifting from the chrome-encrusted exhaust.

"I want," he said to her, "to pick your brains." This was not unusual; some came on coarse, others less explicit. Her drug delivery pump turned over, relieving her of responsibility for her emotions. Calmness

descended like a smothering blanket. He adjusted his hat and she glimpsed white, aged hair beneath; a strange, expensive image in a place where youth was mass-produced and permanent. Behind them, the inn receded from view, merged with the horizon to become just another part of the DreamTime.

"I want," he said, "information."

Which was wrong.

If you were here – corporeally here – in this Expanded and over-engineered world and you looked up, you would see a planet called Earth. This is the farthest-flung outpost of humanity, less than a third of a million kilometres from the place where your distant ancestors cracked skulls with laboriously chiselled stones. Only twelve people – corporeal people – ever visited this place, and that was before the Expansion. They were astronauts, and their visits were the culmination of a horrifyingly expensive venture called the Apollo project. The population of the Expansion is now estimated at fourteen billion people – and that ignores artificial intelligences and borderline individuals like animals.

At the time of those visits it was believed that the only room left for expansion was outwards into space, once the resources of the earth were exhausted. This outlandishly misguided idea was the result of sloppy reasoning that repeated the classic error of all predictions: that what has already happened will set the pattern for the future. Nothing could be further from the truth – and they were already developing the techniques that facilitated Expansion. Computer simulations, robotics – especially automated manufacturing systems – and direct thought-input to computers.

By the end of the twentieth century, the seed technologies were firmly established, and by the middle of the twenty-first they were already bearing fruit. And by the middle of the twenty-second century barely anyone existed on Earth any more.

Dr Zodiac, as Terry thought of him, smiled ghoulishly as he drove back towards the inn in the wilderness. A light briefly flickered to their right, a strobing emission of colour as a visitor appeared from some other part of the Expansion. Through the window Terry briefly glimpsed a dark figure astride a baroque motorcycle, dust flickering upwards in minute stormclouds around the tyres. Dr Zodiac drove on, a potato-sack figure behind the wheel.

"What are you after?" she demanded, increasingly afraid of this strange elderly apparition. His ugliness had something basic about it, something disturbing in a place where diseases of degeneracy were obsolete and replaced by degenerate, diseased behaviour. He turned his withered face towards her when he spoke, as if she interested him, a very old-fashioned style of conversation. From Terry's perspective it was sinister.

"I need information," he said. "I need you, and I need a grave robber."

"Why?" she asked, realizing her error only as she said it, compounding the disaster. He cackled. It sounded hideous, mechanical, the larynx of a corpse manipulated by a madman with a compressor. Then



Illustrations by Duncan Fegredo

she shivered as the landscape *changed* abruptly. Terry felt sweat beading her spine like cold pearls, trickling down her nakedly vulnerable back. It didn't matter that this experience was synthetic, like everything else in the Expansion; she was synthetic too, in a manner of speaking. The landscape had distorted, altered without warning as if this being, Dr Zodiac, could control the DreamTime by thought alone. She knew what that meant; it meant trouble.

He laughed again. Exactly the same, repeated; a loop of reality kept pulling him back to repeat the previous action. The moon that glared down at them from above was only the vision of a moon, an idea of what the moon should look like from Earth, an idea held by the Expansion. Terry turned and grabbed at the handle of the door as the desert around her flickered again. Chrome came apart in her fingers and trickled away as dust that laughed at her. False moonlight lay coldly on the ivory-painted car bonnet; the skeleton of a laugh emanated from the seat next door. Panic struck her savagely between the eyes, then the drug pump started up and drowned everything.

Something stopped.

Time, like a trapped tape freeing itself from an entanglement within a player, resumed its normal progress. The sallow face beside her shifted abruptly from gallows humour to electric-chair urgency: "What happened?" he demanded. A hand left the steering wheel and veered towards her like an angry snake. "What happened to me?"

"You looped," she observed placidly. The hand paused and she cringed from it, retreating as close to the door as possible. She had a feeling that if it touched her something unspeakable would happen.

"Chronomancy," he said venomously. "A trap; an endless loop, a trapdoor subroutine...digitized death. They want me back!" He ended on a keening note, a fearsome but pathetic yearning. The vehicle swerved across weird gravel that seemed to disappear just beyond the corners of her eyes.

Far ahead, the inn was coming into view. Dr Zodiac wanted a grave robber, Terry remembered vaguely. Very well; she had one in mind.

Me.

The principle of Expansion: the greater the number of variables in a computer simulation, the slower the simulation will run in real time. But the internal simulation time will remain the same. Simulate a human brain; it might run more slowly but you'll be able to get away with a smaller processor because it's a trade-off of speed for time. Speed for compactness. Silicon is cheap and durable; use self-reproducing robot factories to turn an entire moon into an enormous microprocessor. *Live* in it...a universe subject to total control by its inhabitants. The Expansion crumbled at the edges, and the degeneracy was called the DreamTime; a place of slowing-down and errors in the structure of reality.

Dr Zodiac was a chronomancer. She'd figured that much out for herself when she saw him cruising silently behind the wall of the magic garden she frequented. Silent as the night she'd drifted out to his magic-carpet-turned-Ford, shown him her back – more than the eye but less than a soul – and fallen into those keyhole-shaped pupils. It had been like a lock turning in her mind; a promise of naked power had dragged her into the car. Her speciality was power-fantasies for insecure men; spinal implants and a puppet body, a toy to destruction. On a deserted planet a third of a million kilometres away her original body was stored in liquid nitrogen as a template. She had a very bitter, private joke: her real body, the stuff of blood and frozen ashes, was virginal.

She'd been in the DreamTime for twenty years, subjectively. About two centuries, in actual fact. Before she met the Chronomancer.

She put the finger on me crudely, because the pump in her head had pushed her mind out through her ears; the high she was on felt flat. Dr Zodiac had a snooper-field in his car; a tap into the DreamTime substrate that gave him a localized map of the environment. From within his car he could look through walls. Terry didn't quite know what she was doing, otherwise she'd have tried not to cooperate. But fear was the cue that triggered her pump, and she'd been absolutely terrified for quite a while. Dr Zodiac nodded to himself; with a whining and an emphatic clank of locks, the front doors of the car swung open. Sand whirled and danced away across the ground in diffuse streamers as he got out. He fixed Terry with a withering smile.

"Stay," he commanded, then turned away towards the inn. Terry stayed; she saw Zodiac stride towards the tent and vanish through the fabric as if it was no more than a curtain of air. She tried to review her defence program half-heartedly; it was no surprise that somehow she'd been locked out of it. Nothing she could manage would be much use against a Chronomancer.

She saw two figures emerge from the tent wall. One was Zodiac; the other was squat, darkly naked from the waist up, and had a face as shut as a censored book. The two of us circled round to opposite doors before getting in, like enemies; strangely, the front seat accomodated three passengers with ease. As Dr Zodiac shifted into gear and coasted off, Terry glanced at me. What she saw only added to her insecurity; the inscrutable reassurance of a hangman who wishes his victim no ill, but intends to make her passing more efficient. Everywhere she looked she saw less reason for hope. For my part, I was numbed by expectations: but, as I learned, Zodiac hadn't told me the complete truth.

"You want to know why I want you," announced Zodiac in the direction of the windscreen wipers. They thudded uselessly in the windswept desert. He seemed confident of his ability, so self-assured that I shivered. Terry crouched between us like a mouse that was the subject of conflict between two weasels. I waited for Zodiac to finish his piece without my prompting.

"I make the assumption," he said dryly, "that you are aware of the field of endeavour called Chronomancy. Of the fact that practitioners learn to control events by changing the local time-base of the DreamTime, which is – when all is said and done – little more than a very comprehensive operating system." He snapped his fingers, a brittle noise like twigs breaking beneath a boot. "I am a Chronomancer."

The car rolled across nebulous sands. Rocks encrusted with lichen occasionally veered across the

flood of the headlight beams; nothing big grew in the darkness. Distance in the DreamTime is – was – a psychologically determined effect; how far was our destination? I wondered. The silence within the car seemed to brood darkly. Gravel crumbled beneath the tyres occasionally, grinding down into nothingness. Dr Zodiac drove on.

"I want to break into a sealed datasink," he said after a long enough pause. "The entry protocol is rather exotic. Like you, my dear." He looked at Terry in a way that made me feel sorry for her. "So I need some assistance from outside."

Terry didn't say anything, but by then I had a good idea of what he wanted and I wasn't sure I could go along with it, whatever the price. Being a tomb robber is not a violent profession; I don't want to kill anyone. Not even to get myself out of a trap. I have never liked violence. I glanced at Terry again to see if she understood what was at issue here, but all I could see was a pair of pinpoint pupils and dangerously shallow breathing. I wouldn't get any help from her quarter, I decided; she was so thoroughly intoxicated that there'd be no meaningful response from her for quite a time yet. It was frustrating: I wanted to throw something through that plate-glass window behind her eyes, but right when she ought to have been at her most aware there was nobody home to answer the call. She'd made the crucial mistake of programming her drug pump to remove her from all sources of pain – a necessity in her line of work, but a liability anywhere else.

It looked like a valley and it felt like a valley. A cold wind blew down it, funnelled away from the relatively tame terrain around the Inn, towards the real wilderness beyond. The exposed ridges of sandstone were a dirty grey, pitted with dark openings in which the poor light shed by the car guttered and faded. Information sinks. This was a tombstone place, a sector of the Expansion in which data had been buried; retrieval not provided for. I'd seen other tombstone places – I worked in them – but few as ominous as this one. Strategic defence information, blackmail data, restricted directories of names and utilities... who knew what murderous secrets were buried here?

"How did you find this?" I asked, half-hoping Zodiac wouldn't hear me.

"It took time and application," replied the Chronomancer. "It's adjacent to a very early part of the DreamTime substrate, almost at the beginning; the place where the original simulation parameters were set up and the first colonists inserted. Certain ghosts were also injected here, time-sharing with the DreamTime but outside it. This is a breakthrough point."

"What possible use can a ghost like that be?" I asked.

"Power." Zodiac chuckled, a whispery noise like bones being tipped out of a sarcophagus. I looked at Terry, a fragile figure in graveyard black slumped between us. "The power to move outside the DreamTime is the power to control the DreamTime; it's a hierarchy of realities you see, your reality embedded within mine. I *need* that power."

"Why?"

He was silent for a moment. "So I can survive."



"Help me to get her out of the car."

Together we frog-marched Terry to a small opening in the cliff face. She was almost a dead weight, unable to support herself; halfway there she moaned slightly and twisted her head from side to side. Still heavily narcotized, she recognized a blurred image of two extra heads; one on each shoulder. Strangely, one of them had eyes like a cat. And both were male.

Inside the cave, we found a strange kind of altar. It fused with the surrounding rock seamlessly; contours delineated the shape of a human body, sloping upwards to form a pillow for the head.

"We put her in here," said Zodiac casually. "Then you go outside the cave and I activate the key. The ghost-system only intersects for a short time; during that time I shall be gone from this place" – his eyes swept the cave, disinterestedly – "and then I shall return. I only require one trip."

"What do you want from me?" I asked. "What of her?"

Zodiac spoke calmly and quietly, without a hint of malice. No such warning was needed. "Your job is simple. After I activate it you will re-enter the cave and remove my comatose body from it. Then you wait. If you fail or act incorrectly I will eventually catch up with you...next time. It will take a long time but I will find you. As to what becomes of her, that is not relevant to your task."

So my guess was accurate. The builders of the ghost program required a human mind as a co-factor for activation; or to be less euphemistic, a human sacrifice. Terry was just warm meat to Dr Zodiac; the realization stung.

"What becomes of her?" I asked, softly. He looked at me and I saw two people looking at me through those keyhole-shaped pupils. One of them was cold and uncaring and dead to the world; the other still had a marginal appreciation of life, but was in thrall to the other.

"She sleeps for a while, when I'm away in the ghost. But when I return, she enters the other program structure for good because the way in is a trapdoor; it demands an entry to balance an exit. Don't expect to see her again; she won't be dead, just elsewhere." He was silent for a moment, then gestured at me as if I was some kind of insect that troubled him. "Go on, go away for now. It's time."

I left the cave and stood for a while in the drifting sands. There was a bitter taste to the air because now I had all the facts and a dilemma. Rescue Zodiac or rescue Terry. Which? A grey cloud, somehow defying the prevailing winds, fluttered across the horizon like a vaporous bat. Everything in the DreamTime is alive, but some of it is more alive than the rest. Even the sand screamed silently at the burden of my feet. Behind me, Zodiac activated the trapdoor key for the second time...the first time round he hadn't taken a companion. How he had achieved even a few moments freedom from the ghost remains a mystery. What was it like to live in a ghost? Had it twisted him until he was willing to sacrifice another person to the same loneliness in order to escape, or had he been so inclined before? I kicked the sand, meditatively, then turned round and went back inside the cave.

Terry lay on the altar. She was breathing in shallow gasps, still unconscious but alive. I looked for Dr Zodiac. He didn't seem to be there. Where had he gone? The cave was small, the bulk of it filled by the altar slab; I looked behind it. I saw mummified bones, yellowed and friable sticks that had somehow fused with the stone of the floor. How long does fossilization take when time itself is a variable? I tried to pick Terry up, and she was heavy; somehow I got her over my back and carried her out of the cave. I imagined that I could hear a faint wailing somewhere, a voice of damnation. Best keep faith with my predecessors – for if I was to release him, would not all those who conspired to keep such power imprisoned suffer for it? – and leave him bound for the future.

As I carried her through the entrance, I saw the car lying abandoned in the desert. Sand spilled through the open cage of rusted scrap metal that was all that remained of it. I wondered who he had been, what desperation had driven him to tamper with the construction of those who built the Expansion. Stones migrated slowly across the valley floor behind us, covering my footprints with a fine dusting of time. Was it possible that they'd designed the ghost program just to trap people like him? Darkness shrouded the desert. I tried to envisage the Terminal Inn on the horizon and nearly succeeded. It was going to be a long walk: I put Terry down and waited.

She opened her eyes. They were hazelnut, the colour of mud at the bottom of a pool. But there was somebody behind them.

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**Charles Stross**, born in 1964, is the author of "The Boys" (*IZ* 22). He is a prolific writer of short stories, most as yet unpublished, and has been working on a novel. One of his latest projects is a critical fanzine known as *Soliton*, which he is editing in collaboration with Simon Ings. Its first issue boasts an article on "Gibson's 'Trilogy': Overdrive or Overkill?" (for further details write to Mr Ings at 10 Marlowe Court, Lymer Avenue, London SE19 1LP).

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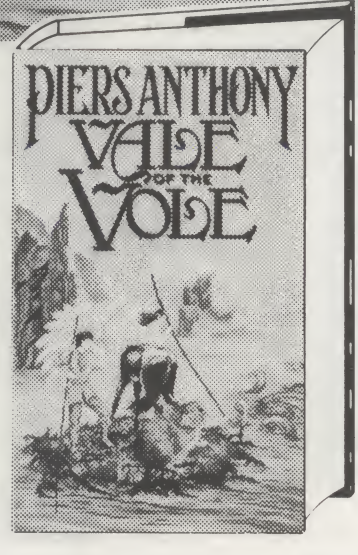
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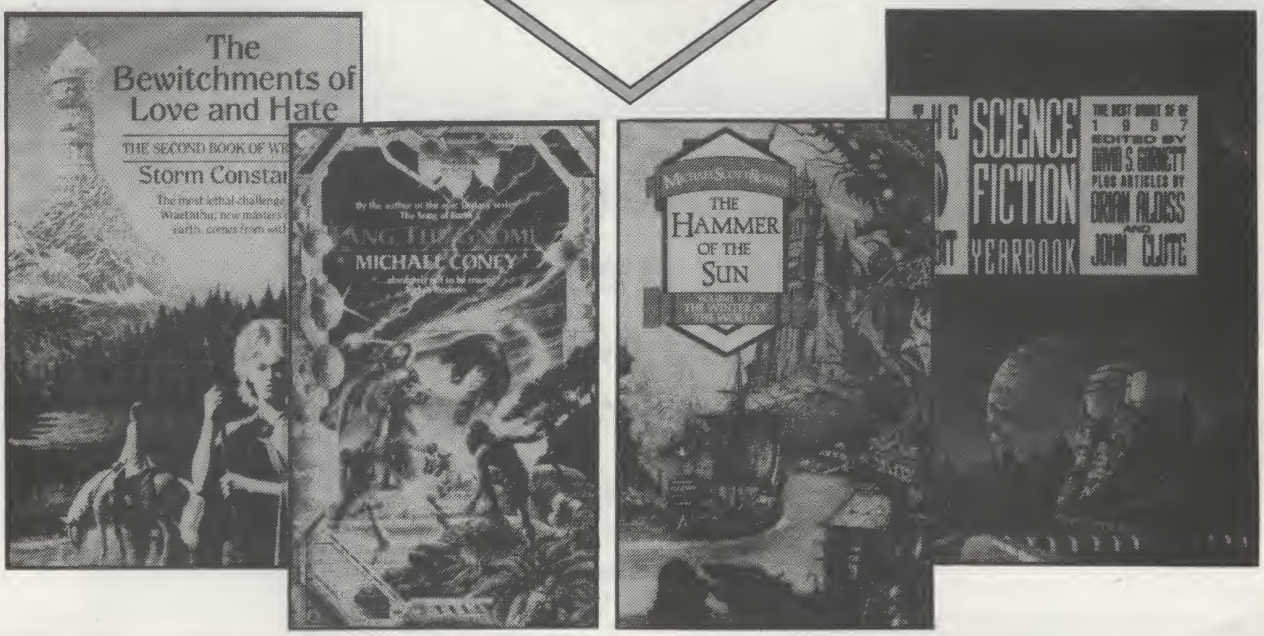
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# Gargleblasting

## John Clute

It is a fine new day and the suns are bright. Dew glistens on the robot and the axe. The robot says Good morning, or perhaps it is the axe, which you stole as a child from the secret fortress in the mountain, and which looks very grave today. Suddenly a mother ship of the enemy pierces the upper atmosphere, blotting out a sun. The axe begins to sing. Nothing could be finer than to live in a space opera, just before the war. But you've got to believe in the thing. The problems Iain "M" Banks had with *Consider Phlebas* (1987), his first attempt at contributing to the genre, lay not in any absence of space-opera paraphernalia, which he was markedly unchary of supplying in crates, or from a lack of stylistic muscle, because he is a writer jovial with energy, a jostler of material, a flexer. What flummoxed *Phlebas* had nothing to do with any failure of excess, but with the fact that his tale of self-destruction and futility constantly *argued* with the space-opera frame in which it took place, so that whenever Banks flexed his muscles he tended to break every bone in the book. It all made an unholy racket, or so this reviewer argued in *Interzone* 20, and *Consider Phlebas* ended up pounding the shit out of itself.

The reader of *Phlebas* may remember that the changeling mercenary and exile whose tale it tells (his name is Borza Horza, which sounds rather like what geldings do to mares) chooses the wrong side in a galaxy-spanning war, and that the forces of the Culture finally triumph over the ludicrous bullies he's chosen to work with. The protagonist of **The Player of Games** (Macmillan, £11.95; limited ed £75), which is Banks's second science fiction novel, and a vast improvement on the first, makes no such mistake, though *his* name is so long and stertorous (like a golem's fart) that Banks only mentions it once in 300 pages. The *short* form of this hero's monicker is (for there is something about Iain "M" Banks that does not like a name that humans can pronounce) Jernau Morat Gurgeh (or, as I found myself subvocalizing it, Jarndyce Deadly Gargle), and at one point (it is a moment one fears the author does not think is funny) aliens *mispronounce* the full form, addressing him as Chark Gavantsha Gernow Morat Gurgee Dam Hazeze. An incident is narrowly averted. But this is not all. The drone who monitors Deadly Gargle through thick and thin will only answer to Sprant Flere-Imsaho Wu-Handrahen Xato Trabiti near the end of the book, some time after the reader has become accustomed to addressing him under his alias, Trebel Flere-Imsaho Ep-Handra Lorgin Estral; the girl terraformer Gargle lives with is called Yay Meristinoux; and when he finally destroys the Evil Empire he is destined to destroy, the first human Jarndyce Deadly Gargle meets, the Culture ambassador, is one Shohobohaum Za. So we have one drone with two dyslexias, one cheerleader on a piste, and an enormous bottle of Za. And we have hardly begun. Bit players include Olz Hap, Professor Boruelal, Chamlis Amalk-ney, Lo Pequil Monenine. (Trinev Dutleysdaughter, whose surname is altogether too sane, appears only once.) There is an Orbital called Chiark, and a river called Groasnachek, and a country retreat called Ikroh, and a moderately serious point can surely be made before we stop about Banks's way with a name: When they come across strange sound mounds, most readers will attempt to subvocalize them (I certainly do), and each time the miscegenate syllables that designate the hero besmear a page of this book the tongue stalls, the eye falters. Every time an unpronounceable growth of vowel and consonant appears in a text like *The Player of Games*, a baulk is laid against the mind's tongue, a jam against the act (and art) of reading. Even where they seem to aspire to wit, Banks's way with proper names reminds one of fanzine humour at its most maniacally tedious; and this book is too good to spoil.

Seven hundred years have passed since *Consider Phlebas*, and the Culture continues to exercise a loose hegemony over the home galaxy. On Chiark Orbital, Jernau Morat Gurgeh, perhaps the finest human generalist of games in the Culture, begins to grow stale. Like Borza Horza of the previous volume, Gurgeh is something of an internal exile; but there is nothing of the potential suicide in his makeup. At the same time he is vulnerable, and is easily bamboozled into an action open to blackmail. The disgraced drone Mawhrin-Skel (drones being portable, legally autonomous AIs) soon threatens to expose him unless he manages to finagle his (Skel's) readmission into the elite Contact corps of the Culture. Coincidentally (as it seems), Gurgeh is now invited by a Contact drone to travel on the Culture's behalf to the evil empire of Azad, a civilization shaped around the public and private agons of a game that so thoroughly maps and engrosses the hierarchies of empire that it is itself azad. Gurgeh agrees to make the long trip on condition that Skel be considered for readmission into Contact. Seemingly reluctant, the drone agrees.

The rest of the book is easy to understand, easy to follow, easy to decipher; it is swift, surefooted, pell-mell, and glows with a benign luxuriance. And harmony reigns. The story does not poison the world-rules that monitor it; the muscles do not break the bones. There are two clear reasons for this earned truce. One) although Gurgeh has transparently been fitted up for his Empire-demolishing role, Azad does deserve (in space-opera terms) its comeuppance, and Gurgeh accomplishes his mission with panache and some cunning. Indeed, most readers will assume he has tumbled to the true location and role of Mawhrin-Skel as soon as they do, about half-way through the story; and will consequently assume that his subsequent playing of Skel's game is elated and *volunteer*. Two) Banks gives all his allegiance as writer to the Culture itself, which he draws in terms both utopian and pragmatic. For the spacefaring citizens of the Culture, energy is essentially free, which snaps the unholy linkage of money and power; larger problems of logistics remain safely under the control of the vast (but witty) Minds who shape our mortal ends; as befits a civilization of autonomous hedonists, public crimes are punished through shame (ostracism) rather than guilt (penance), and there are no laws governing private behaviour; by becoming even more fully himself, Gurgeh does only what the great Minds clearly intend of their human charges. Within the celebratory frame of this exhilarated, comic, glowing book, Gurgeh's triumph over Azad is a triumph of genuine Culture over caricature (Azad's similarity to the loadsamoney factory farm solitude that is modern Britain cannot be anything but deliberate). And so the truce obtains. Gurgeh returns to his home Orbital, and lies with Yay (hurrah), and the worlds are won for real people. Would we live there.

There is nothing wrong with **Cradle** (Gollancz, £11.95) by Arthur C. Clarke (whose name appears in giant letters on the dustwrapper) and Gentry Lee (whose letters are wee) that cutting the book in half and completely rewriting the residue couldn't fix maybe. An

alien starseeder spaceship needing repairs lands in the ocean near Key West, hornswoggling an experimental guided missile and driving whales crazy. A human cast gets its knickers wet searching for the buried treasure. The robot crew of the ship persuades the good guys to provide it with some gold the bad guys stole from the good guys many years earlier, and uses the gold to repair the ship, and the ship leaves, after 308 pages. The bulk of this deliriously inept novel is devoted to wooden life histories of the various humans who make up the cast (but not one single potted word of resumé links up, in any fashion whatsoever, to the tiny bit of action that ends the book) and to philistine descriptions of the transformation of Key West into a theme park of unparalleled egregiousness (the Chamber of Commerce booster-lingo utilized by the authors to describe the physical transfer of the *interior* of Ernest Hemingway's original bar from a real building in a real street in the real world into the middle of a covered shopping mall with Muzak must be read to be believed). But one must not refer to *authors*. Clarke may have supplied the synopsis, and a few of the cleaner passages about the seedling stars; but surely Gentry Lee (and a word-processor without Help or Delete or Esc! Esc!) must actually have *written* the thing. Mr Clarke has tied himself to a dog's tail. It is no way to approach the end of such a career.

Rudy Rucker's **Wetware** (Avon, $2.95; forthcoming in the UK from NEL) is clumsy, jagged, witty, metaphysical, bumptious, pixillated and first-draft. It follows on some years after the close of *Software*. Sladek-style robots have their own city on the Moon. Their language games are stunningly laid on. But the plot thickens. Humans connive and deceive. The robots want to sleep with Mother Earth and drink oceans of new data up her umbilicals. Some plots are thwarted, others begin to build up steam. It looks like spaghetti junction with kyphosis and no way out of Birmingham, but a third volume is promised; if Rucker can spare a few extra days to write the thing down in calm tame English, a brilliant conclusion may ensue.

Mark V. Ziesing's series of small press publications continues with a bulky fable carved in stone. Lucius Shepard's stunning long moral tale, **The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter** (Ziesing, $16.95, limited ed. $35), returns to the slightly po-faced Marchen terrain of "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule," and to the same mile-long stoned dragon, cast into immobility by a wizard in the dawn of the world, but still capable of dominating his environment through a geology of dreams "emanating from the cold tonnage of his brain." A young woman flees through its open mouth into the veins and cavities of the interior of the huge metaphysical beast of Umwelt, where, watched over by brain-damaged art-critics, the great heart of the Thing Itself prepares to beat. After many years, the young woman – wiser, reborn, extremely formidable – returns to the surface, where she will continue to live, like Dorothea at the end of *Middlemarch*, unsung but singing, it may be. *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter* is short enough to grasp in one sitting, but dense enough to fix the mind upon its gravitas, the veined ore of its gift. Buy it.

# Psychic Horrors
## Paul J. McAuley

The economic lives of most writers of sf are so exiguous that out of necessity successful (usual definition: prizewinning) short fictions are often inflated into novels, while excerpts from works in progress masquerade as self-contained short fictions in the magazines. So it's not surprising to find that the first section of Lucius Shepard's **Life During Wartime** (Grafton, £10.95), consists of his novella, "R&R," which won a Nebula in 1986. What is surprising is that nothing is made of this on the jacket. There is a blushing refusal to admit that Shepard has ever written any sf at all, let alone won prizes for it, and instead of the ritual puffs from (say) Roger Zelazny and Algis Budrys, we must rely on blurbs from such luminaries as Russell Banks and Bob Shacochis. A tactic to break Shepard into the mundane world of literature perhaps, but a tactic liable to fall flat on its face given that the text is built around unreconstructed sf plot devices.

After only a few sentences, it is apparent that we are back in what, if he is not careful, will soon be known as Shepard Country: wartorn Central America and superstition-riddled Caribbean islands some time in the near future, steeped in gritty yet often magical realism. The novel's anti-hero is a young soldier by the name of Mingolla, whom we first meet in a Rest & Recreation brothel town as he is trying to recover from a particularly horrifying but inconclusive brush with the enemy. Mingolla falls in with a young woman, Debra, who is possessed of the same sort of unfocused psychic powers as he, and who works for the resistance. Later, recruited by the Psicorps, his powers given an edge by drug therapy, Mingolla is set loose on Debra's trail and finds himself mixed up in a war within the war. Two families of natural psychics who have insinuated themselves into positions of power throughout the world are attempting to make peace after centuries of hostility. United, they would be able to complete their domination of the world, and only Mingolla and Debra, their separate powers fused, are able to stand up to them.

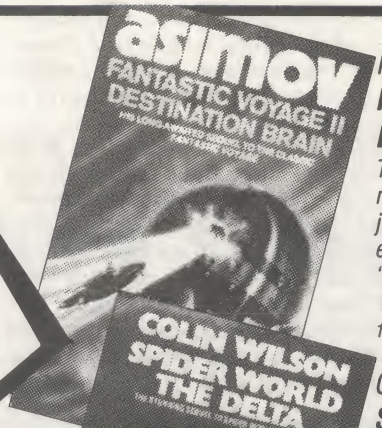
It's a grim journey through the dehumanizing horror of modern state-sanctioned guerrilla warfare, in which it becomes apparent that those running the war are if anything more dehumanized than those who, tanked up on combat drugs and gripped by fantasy and superstition, are fighting it: an ambitious work, but one whose whole is somehow not as great as its parts, not so much a novel as a series of novellas separated by sudden transitions in setting and Mingolla's attitude and resolve. And the plot, in which the supermen who really run the world are opposed by a uniquely gifted but otherwise ordinary youngster whose struggles help him gain a measure of wisdom, is pure pulp sf, and also recalls Shepard's first novel, *Green Eyes*. But the power of Shepard's writing mostly overcomes these limitations. It exhibits an unsurpassed richness of texture that's shot through with images of random violence and technology overwhelmed by nature, recalling the luminous iconography of J.G. Ballard's best work:

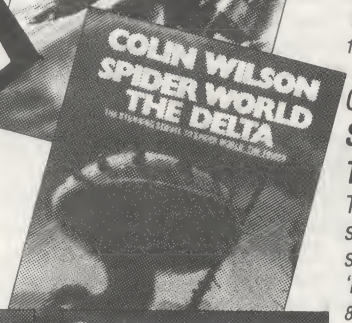
*The helicopter was slim, black, cigar shaped, and had not fallen to earth, but was suspended about twenty feet above the floor of the hollow by a webbing of vines and shattered branches; with its crack-webbed cockpit eyes and buckled rotors, it showed in semi-silhouette against the low sun like a mystical embryo, the unborn child of a gigantic alien race. Epiphytes fountained from the rotors, dripping crimson and lavender blooms, and butterflies appeared to materialize from the dazzles of the cockpit plastic, glowing flakes of white gold.*

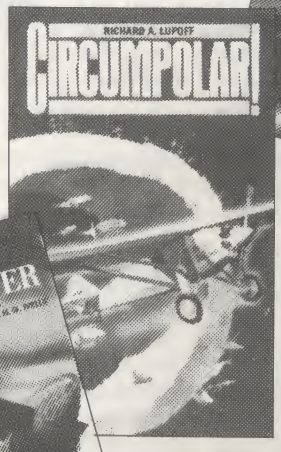
This kind of visionary writing has given Shepard a deservedly enviable record as an sf short story writer. *Life During Wartime* doesn't quite live up to that reputation, or to Shepard's ambition, but for all its flaws it is a memorable work.

Ian Watson's **The Fire Worm** (Gollancz, £10.95) is also constructed around a short story: the originally self-contained "Jingling Geordie's Hole" (from *Interzone* 17), a nostalgic tale of schoolboy buggery which results in the monstrous pregnancy of the seduced schoolboy and his eventual assimilation by the fossilized matrix of a malignant intelligence, the eponymous fireworm of the novel. Watson cleverly embeds the story as one of a series of hypnotically recalled "past lives" recalled by a patient undergoing psychiatric analysis. Rather

# THE SHAPE OF S-F TO COME
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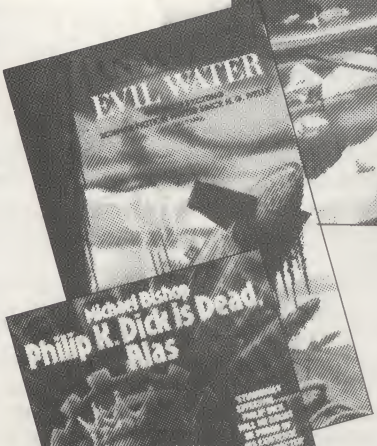


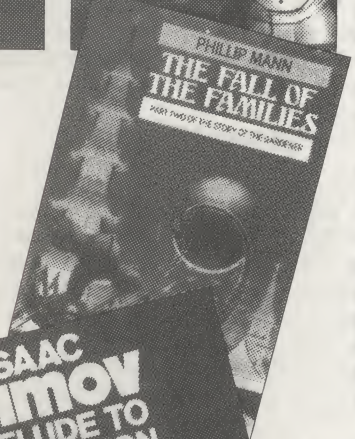


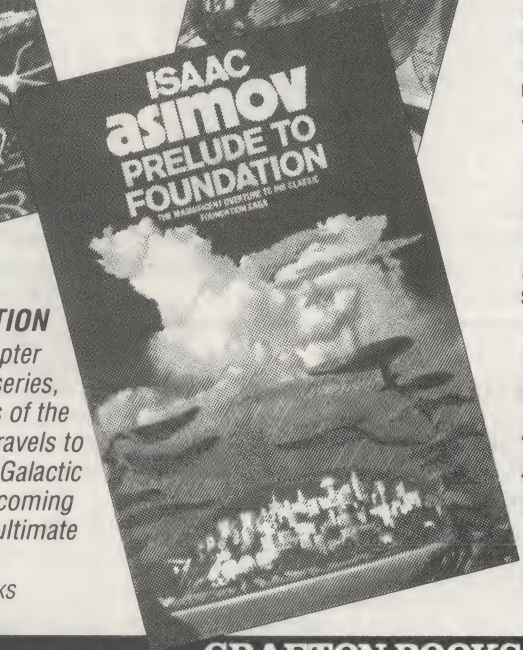











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than constructing these episodes from unconsciously received facts, however, this particular patient appears to have actually lived through them, and all are linked to the fireworm, which turns out to be the remnant of a medieval alchemical Chernobyl. The psychiatrist is also a clandestine writer of horror novels, and as he listens to these recounted episodes his malevolent novelistic alter ego comes to dominate him, leading to a cathartic all-consuming conclusion. It's a complex novel which mixes the visceral grip of the horror genre with sexual psychology and sf rationality, but it doesn't quite come off. Watson has partly returned to the style which preceded the more relaxed approach of *The Book of the River*, throwing out strings of unassimilated facts and obsessively riddling his ideas for their least signficance, leaving nothing for the reader to imagine. This is especially apparent in the historical episodes, which too often read like a random walk through the author's filing cabinet, and despite Watson's masterful weaving of past and present, and some deft characterization, his continual explication defuses a great deal of the narrative's cumulative dread. The denouement, in which rationality is finally overwhelmed by darkness, seems almost perfunctory. A little less rationalization on the part of the author would have made it more memorable.

Rachel Pollack's **Unquenchable Fire** (Century, £5.95) shares the same setting (but no more than that) of her short story "The Malignant One" (which appeared in *Interzone* 16), in which the trappings of contemporary America are overlain by ritual and magic, a kind of fantasy alternative history. Some time in the past, we learn, the Founders led a spiritual revolution which transformed the world. The Founders are gone, but their feats are still publicly celebrated by the stories of the Tellers – but the Tellers are no longer what they were, have become corrupted by the mundane world, and Jennifer Mazdan finds, to her horror, that she is the chosen vehicle by which the fire of the revolution will be reignited, when she becomes pregnant after a dream. That's more or less all there is to the plot, for after a couple of unsuccessful attempts to rid herself of the miraculous embryo, Jennifer becomes resigned to her fate. The imposition on Jennifer's body and her role as a helpless carrier of the unwanted invader may well mirror the lot of all too many women in the real world, but it's a risky authorial choice given that we expect ordinary people to react to the extraordinary things that happen to them in fantasy novels, not lapse into a sulking fit. If the book consisted only of Jennifer's story, it might have become more than a trifle wearying, but her story is only one strand, woven together with gossipy insights and mutagenized myths which give us some idea of how the revolution happened and what it brought. The sheer density of witty imagination which Pollack brings to bear lifts *Unquenchable Fire* into a category all of its own, and in the end, Jennifer's passive goodness, Candide-like, illuminates both petty and major corruption and allows her a dignified apotheosis; a satisfying conclusion to a wonderful, funny, disturbing and, by God, original fantasy.

Most sf, of course, cleaves to tried and tested formulae, which brings us to James P. Hogan's **Endgame Enigma** (Century, £6.95), a tired farrago of clichéd cold-war rhetoric and mechanical hard sf done up in airport bestseller style. The thing (I refuse to call it a novel) reads like a badly translated technical manual, and there's actually very little science in it, and certainly no speculation. Mostly, there is a lot of engineering, and towards the end diagrams begin to crowd words off the pages. Only the most fanatical *Analog* reader will find anything entertaining in it.

Lord knows what that hypothetical being would make of A.A. Attanasio's **Arc of the Dream** (Grafton, £3.95), which although ostensibly grounded in particle physics and cosmology is actually a quest tale concerning four people recruited at random and given miraculous powers by an alien visitor from "4-space" incarnated as a small coin which must be returned to its precise point of entry before time runs out and it blows most of Hawaii to bits. Running the gamut of New Age narcissism and hippy psychobabble before expiring on a note of purple romanticism, it's not actually as dreadful as it could be. Attanasio's prose style, thick and gluey and verging on the dyslexic as it often is, nevertheless throws up splendid images (especially in the tale of a ninety year old Chinese peasant's pilgrimage around half the world), and there's a sly humour which saves the narrative from complete collapse. Denied access to anything larger than a pocket dictionary and given firm editorial control, Attanasio could turn out something readable.

## Future Vigilantism

I'd not read any of Robert Sheckley's "Hunter" series due to a distaste for the whole "Deathwish"/vigilante genre, but I have to admit that I disliked **Hunter/Victim** (Methuen, £10.95) less than I thought I would. At face value it is a crude revenge story (protagonist's wife is killed by terrorists, so he goes out to kill people like them); however the old Sheckley frequently breaks through, and things threaten to dissolve into the absurdity we know and love. Organized crime is almost entirely run by militant Green scientists (they're cleverer than the business types they displaced). The Hunters know they only execute deserving cases because "our measurements for badness were developed for us by licenced semanticists working in conjunction with highly motivated programmers." The killer takes too many drugs and completely cocks up his mission in an almost totally disconnected final sequence.

I was left wondering whether the author is just trying to make some money out of this twaddle or attempting to satirize the vigilante genre from within. Is he trying to write an exploitation novel for liberals (the Contras and CIA are the bad guys throughout, and the radical right is lobbying for legalization of murder) or is he endeavouring to persuade me to laugh with him at the morons who actually think the world is like a Dirty Harry movie? I finished the book with a feeling that someone, somewhere, was being had.

An even more violent near-future is depicted in **The Fall of the Republic** by Crawford Kilian (Legend, £2.99). A super-intelligent teenage army officer, absolute ruler of Idaho and Utah in an emergency military government of the USA in the 1990s, is drawn into a computer-hackers' conspiracy to overthrow the USA and save the world from the imminent destruction revealed by scientific investigation into parallel worlds. The resolution is in the sequel, **The Empire of Time** (recently released by the same publisher, same price). I enjoyed this pair of stories far more than I expected, perhaps because I got the impression that the author is a nice person.

**Timefall** by James Kahn (Grafton, £3.50) is also a multiple-worlds novel, hung on the time-worn plot device of memoirs left to the author by an obsessed man who has had some nasty experiences with lost civilizations in the Amazonian jungle. He discovers that the universe is in deadly danger from evil goings-on in a parallel time, and loses his soul in the process of saving the world from unimaginable horror. I found the skulls, snakes and sacrifices irritating distractions before getting down to the really weird stuff, but perhaps there are horror fans out there who will disapprove of all the boring cosmology in the later parts of the story (which I liked).

The least satisfactory of this issue's books is **Golden Sunlands** (Legend, £2.99), in which Christopher Rowley invents an unconvincing wild-west future world (where the unexplained word "tronch" occurs 18 times in the first seven pages), then wipes the place

out in chapter two, and has all his characters taken to an ill-defined artificial universe with loads of small red stars floating in it. I'll give the sequel a miss.

A better attempt to outdo *Ringworld* occurs in the second of Donald Moffitt's two books: **The Genesis Quest** and **Second Genesis** (Sphere, £3.50 each). A doomed human race sends out messages to be picked up millions of years later by a totally alien race ("...their arithmetic is to base ten, so they must have ten limbs like ourselves") who then create new humans by genetic engineering. After many generations these humans want to go "home." Space is very, very big and Mr Moffitt seems to have done his homework – the whole thing takes about 67 million years. My physics isn't good enough to know whether the extremely large structure they find when they finally get here could possibly hold itself together. It's all great fun, though. I never thought of wood as being the obvious material for spaceships before, but it grows on you.

**Dome** by Michael Reaves and Steve Perry (VGSF, £2.95) is set in a mobile undersea colony, the last community to survive a nuclear and biological war. I'm afraid the characters didn't convince, although the emerging artificial intelligences were sometimes fun.

**Denner's Wreck** by Lawrence Watt-Evans (Avon, $2.95) is the sort of thing that might have been a triple-parter in a '50s sf magazine: super-scientific tourists pretend to be gods on a planet whose occupants have reverted to barbarism. In the end they fall out with each other and find they need their lost "primitive" qualities to save themselves. Boy gets girl (or in this case demigoddess). I liked it.

Writing about dancing leaves me bored: it may be fun to do, but it's usually pretty boring to watch, and reading about someone else watching rates poorly. There's a lot of dancing in **The Rapture Effect** by Jeffrey Carver (Futura, £3.95) – it seems to be the only thing that gets through to the aliens that the humans have stupidly declared war on. I never quite believed in the human government that started the war on sight, nor the alien one that stopped it moments after the tide turned in their favour. The aliens are not as well realized as the artificial intelligences, which manage to be genuinely intelligent whilst still just computers.

**Dancer's Luck** by Ann Maxwell (Futura, £2.50) is one of those stories where a band of fugitives who happen to have the fastest spaceship in their arm of the galaxy are searching for their home planet. In this case the 80-odd escaped slaves share about 20 worlds of origin: as only one gets home this time round I guess there will be a sequel or seventeen.

Best of this issue's bunch is **The Dark Lady** by Mike Resnick (Legend, £2.99). An alien art historian on loan to an 8th-millennium auction house notices some odd coincidences in portraits painted in widely separated periods of human history. It turns into a quest. Most sf isn't funny, even when it tries to be. This one is. I look forward to more from Resnick.

**(Ken Brown)**

# Fantasy, Etc.

One of the most fascinating books I've read recently is **The Grey Horse** by R.A. MacAvoy (Bantam, £2.95). Most beautifully written, it has the timeless charm of a folk tale with the realistic observation of a historical novel. It weaves themes from Celtic folklore with events from 19th-century Irish history. The grey horse of the title is a púca, a horse fairy, who has fallen in love with the daughter of a ship owner in a small town in Connemara – "the poorest town in the poorest parish in Ireland." Their story involves the family of a horsetrainer, a local landowner, and that resistance to English rule known as the "Land League." The characters are subtly and sympathetically drawn, full of Irish humour, from the priest with his divided loyalties, to the landowner with his confused ones, to Áinrai the trainer with his exultant joy in horses. The púca himself (the son of granite and the wind) is enigmatically solid and uncompromisingly fey as he takes on the problems of the community.

Celtic stories again in **Women in Celtic Myth** by Moyra Caldecott (Arrow, £3.99), this time from the more ancient legends of Cuchulain and Pryderi. The writer has gone to such sources as the Mabinogion and the Red Book of Leinster and has retold the stories of such strong women as Emer, Deidre, Rhiannon and the Morrigan (who doesn't really count as a woman). Caldecott adds a series of commentaries which discuss these myths and the ways in which their original tellers may have understood them. More scholarly dissertations on mythological themes than fantasy fiction, perhaps too constrained by respect for their sources, the stories are enjoyable for their thoroughness.

Another retelling of ancient myths, this time from ancient Greece, is **Olympiad** by Nigel Frith (Unwin, £3.95). This is the story of the first Olympic Games and includes the discussions of the Gods, the role of Hercules, and interweaves the story of Atalanta, Meleager and the boad of Calydon. Frith has attempted to recreate an epic style suitable to the subject. "Of untamable Atalanta this tale tells..." At times it slips into a parody of school translations of Homer or Virgil, but for the most part it adds to the enjoyment of the book. That it tends to distance the reader from the characters is not necessarily a disadvantage in the retelling of known myths.

**The Mammoth Book of Fantasy All-Time Greats** edited by Robert Silverberg and Martin H. Greenberg (Robinson, £4.95) has a title which is an invitation to quibble: why no Oscar Wilde or George Macdonald, for instance? (Tolkien didn't write any really short stories so the editors can be forgiven for excluding him.) However it is a pleasure to read an anthology of such high calibre. I particularly enjoyed "The Black God's Kiss" by C.L. Moore and "The Silken Swift" by Theodore Sturgeon, and approved the inclusion of "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Ursula Le Guin's most beautiful and disturbing story. A secondary pleasure was trying to date the stories from their content, although most were of a quality that has not dated in any way.

**Chronicles of the Kencyrath** by P.C. Hodgell (NEL, £4.50) is good value for money. Its 600 pages contain two novels, originally published separately. The world and the history of the Kencyrath is thoroughly detailed, very satisfying if you like your fantasy worlds complete with maps, cosmology and an explanation of the months and festivals. The Kencyrath are a race of people dedicated by their god to a losing battle with "Perimal Darkling" on world after world. They are dispirited, divided, and suspicious of anyone with supernatural power. The story is about a young Kencyr who finds herself exiled, fleeing from the spirits of the dead, in a strange city and with no memory of the previous few years. The characters are sympathetically drawn and the complex society, or rather series of societies from the Thieves Guild to the High Council, solidly developed. There is no mention of a sequel but there are a number of loose ends...

The world of **The Shadow of His Wings** by Bruce Fergusson (Avon, $2.95; forthcoming in the UK from Grafton) is less carefully mapped out. It is an embattled country where the people worship an immortal gigantic winged creature. There is much concern when their "god" fails to come to their help and total defeat appears imminent. Although much is predictable it is compelling in its depiction of the chaos of life in battle, in a beseiged city and in "dungeon" society. The author is good with chaotic people as well: for me the hero's weak and treacherous brother steals the story.

There is very little in the fantasy genre which is successfully humorous so I should welcome **A Malady of Magics** by Craig Shaw Gardner (Headline, £2.99) even if it is hardly the

"romp" which was promised. The wizard Ebenezum becomes allergic to magic, and sneezes uncontrollably whenever there is any around. The book consists of a series of episodes as the wizard and his apprentice travel eagerly to Vushta, "city of unknown sins that could damn a man for life," in search of help, harried by assassins sent by a disgruntled client. Each chapter is introduced by a quotation from the "Sayings of Ebenezum," mostly about very practical concerns such as avoiding debt collectors, rival wizards, "extremely nasty" demons and, of course, disgruntled clients. In this setting the jokes do tend to repeat themselves and it is only in the final third of the book, where many of the previous themes come together, that the humour gets a chance to develop.

**(Phyllis McDonald)**

**East of Laughter** by R.A. Lafferty (Morrigan, £10.95): someone once opined that Lafferty's stories were so unique that they should be assigned a classification of their own. The truth is that they *are* in an established tradition, but one very few sf readers will recognize. Bold fantasy with a strong Catholic tinge, they have more in common with Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* than with contemporary sf. There is little point in describing this new story in detail: any such account would have to be as long as the book that provoked it. In brief, it's about the Scribbling Giants who uphold the world, and about the recruiting of a new set – along with five or six dozen less likely things. Gene Wolfe provides an interesting afterword comparing Lafferty to David Lindsay. But I suspect that Wolfe, like Lafferty, has deliberately copied the style of that other Catholic Scribbling Giant.

**(Andy Robertson)**

Ian Watson's **Whores of Babylon** (Paladin, £3.95) has the ancient city rebuilt in the Arizona desert as a sociological experiment. What, this seeks to answer, are the dynamics of decline and fall? Is the crumbling of empires an unavoidable consequence of the human condition or can a new time-locked isolated Babylon exist forever? The hero doesn't think about this very much as he dons a loincloth and plunges into Babylonian intrigues for the sake of love and an interesting life. Eventually he starts to wonder if he really exists or is just a construct of the computer which is controlling the experiment. Perhaps his adventures illustrate humankind's ability to mess up even the most sure-fire everlasting empire, but they also add up to a rather contrived plot which overshadows the ideas lurking behind it.

**(Simon Ounsley)**

# Books Received June-July 1988

*The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by* Interzone *during the period specified above. They were not necessarily all on sale during these months: official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. This should not be regarded as a complete account of British sf and fantasy publishing during the period in question, since a few publishers have yet to oblige by sending us all their new sf releases – but we hope that this "Books Received" will grow over the coming months until it becomes a genuinely useful bibliographical record. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.*

Abbey, Lynn. **Unicorn and Dragon.** Illustrated by Robert Gould; a "Byron Preiss Visual Publication." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3139-7, 230pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *18th August.*

Achilleos, Chris. **Medusa: The Third Book of Illustrations by Chris Achilleos.** Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-052-5, 144pp, trade paperback, £7.95. (Art book, first edition; hardcover also available but not seen.) *16th June.*

Aldiss, Brian. **Earthworks.** Methuen, ISBN 0-413-17740-8, 126pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1965.) *14th July.*

Aldiss, Brian. **The Malacia Tapestry.** Methuen, ISBN 0-413-17730-0, 292pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1976.) *14th July.*

Anthony, Piers. **Being a Green Mother. Book Five: Incarnations of Immortality.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07095-8, 399pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *4th August.*

Anthony, Piers. **Ghost.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20040-1, 285pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986; there is also a UK hardcover edition from Severn House, 1988 [not seen].) *7th July.*

Asimov, Isaac. **Pirates of the Asteroids.** "The second Space Ranger Novel." Hodder/Lightning, ISBN 0-340-42609-8, 144pp, paperback, £1.95. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA as *Lucky Starr and the Pirates of the Asteroids* by "Paul French", 1953.)

Asimov, Isaac. **Space Ranger.** "The first Space Ranger novel." Hodder/Lightning, ISBN 0-340-42610-1, 144pp, paperback, £1.95. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA as *David Starr, Space Ranger* by "Paul French", 1952.)

Asimov, Isaac, Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh, eds. **Isaac Asimov's Magical World of Fantasy: Spells.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-63-8, 350pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1985.) *18th August.*

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **Isaac Asimov's World of Science Fiction: Intergalactic Empires.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-97-2, 303pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1983.) *21st July.*

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **Isaac Asimov's World of Science Fiction: Supermen.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-98-0, 350pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1984.) *21st July.*

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Classic Science Fiction Short Novels of the 1930s.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-72-7, 572pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf anthology, apparently the first world edition.) *23rd June.*

Attanasio, A. A. **Arc of the Dream.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06913-5, 335pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *23rd June.*

Banks, Iain M. **The Player of Games.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-47110-5, 309pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) *4th August.*

Beagle, Peter S. **The Folk of the Air.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3138-9, 330pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *18th August.*

Benford, Gregory. **Great Sky River.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04303-2, 326pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *7th July.*

Benford, Gregory. **In Alien Flesh.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04142-0, 280pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1986.) *7th July.*

Blaylock, James P. **Land of Dreams.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13292-2, 234pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; there appears to be a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *21st July.*

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, ed. **Sword and Sorceress II: An Anthology of Heroic Fantasy.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3106-0, 287pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1985.)

Burns, Christopher. **About the Body.** Secker & Warburg, ISBN 0-436-09784-2, 193pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Collection, containing some sf and fantasy; four stories first appeared in Interzone; first edition.) *1st August.*

Busby, F. M. **Rebel's Seed.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8260-9, 249pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.)

Chalker, Jack L. **Lords of the Middle Dark: Book One of The Rings of the Master.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42805-2, 357pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *7th July.*

Crichton, Michael. **The Andromeda Strain.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30492-5, 295pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1969.) *19th August.*

Crichton, Michael. **Sphere.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30127-6, 385pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1987.) *19th August.*

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Cradle.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04164-1, 309pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) *21st July.*

Clute, John, David Pringle and Simon Ounsley, eds. **Interzone: The 2nd Anthol-**

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**ogy.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42853-2, 274pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf anthology, first published in 1987.) *11th August.*

Cook, Hugh. **The Walrus and the Warwolf.** "Chronicles of An Age in Darkness Volume 4." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13327-2, 779pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in hardcover by Colin Smythe, 1988.)

Cooke, Catherine. **The Winged Assassin.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8266-8, 279pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Deitz, Tom. **Windmaster's Bane.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8277-3, 279pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *11th August.*

Derleth, August. **The Mask of Cthulhu.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-04139-7, 204pp, paperback, £2.50. (Lovecraftian horror collection, first published in the USA, 1958.) *21st July.*

Derleth, August. **The Trail of Cthulhu.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-04138-9, 256pp, paperback, £2.95. (Lovecraftian horror collection, first published in the USA, 1962.) *21st July.*

Dever, Joe. **Highway Holocaust – Freeway Warrior 1.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-957700-3, 351pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf gamebook, first edition.) *7th July.*

Dick, Philip K. **Nick and the Glimmung.** Illustrated by Paul Demeyer. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04307-5, 141pp, hardcover, £7.95. (Juvenile sf novel, first world edition.) *23rd June.*

Douglas, Carole Nelson. **Keepers of Edanvant: Sword & Circlet 1.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13306-X, 383pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *5th August.*

Emerson, Ru. **To the Haunted Mountains: The First Tale of Nedao.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3140-0, 314pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *18th August.*

Etchison, Dennis. **The Dark Country.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-3727-1, 193pp, paperback, £2.95. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1982.)

Farris, John. **Wildwood.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42644-0, 445pp, paperback, £3.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *7th July.*

Findley, Timothy. **Famous Last Words.** Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-956230-8, 396pp, paperback, £3.99. (Non-sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1981; about a Nazi plot to place the Duke and Duchess of Windsor on the British throne, it had to await the latter's death before it could be published in the UK.) *4th August.*

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Deluge Drivers: Book Three of The Icerigger Trilogy.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42642-4, 311pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *7th July.*

Frith, Nigel. **Olympiad.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440155-8, 224pp, paperback, £3.95. (Mythological fantasy novel, first edition.) *23rd June.*

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Malady of Magicks.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3136-2, 235pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *16th June.*

Gentle, Mary. **A Hawk in Silver.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-955480-1, 192pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1977.) *4th August.*

Gilbert, John. **Aiki.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07373-6, 317pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf martial arts novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *7th July.*

Grant, Richard. **Rumours of Spring.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17448-7, 458pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *5th August.*

Haldeman, Joe. **Tool of the Trade.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8278-1, 261pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1987.) *11th August.*

Hawke, Simon. **The Zenda Vendetta – Timewars 4.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3087-0, 206pp, paperback, £2.99. (SF time-travel novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) *16th June.*

Herbert, Frank. **Eye.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42405-7, 328pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf collection, illustrated by Jim Burns and "packaged" by Byron Preiss; first published in the USA, 1985.)

Herbert, James. **Haunted.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-41616-5, 224pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Horror novel, first edition; there is also a special limited edition [not seen].) *4th August.*

Hodgson, William Hope. **The House on the Borderland.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-89-1, 139pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy/horror novel, first published in 1908.) *18th August.*

Holdstock, Robert. **Where Time Winds Blow.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04279-6, 286pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1981.) *7th July.*

Holland, Cecelia. **Floating Worlds.** "VGSF Classics 26." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04280-X, 542pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1975.) *7th July.*

Holt, Tom. **Expecting Someone Taller.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8264-1, 218pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1987.)

Hubbard, L. Ron. **Mission Earth, Volume 1: The Invaders Plan.** New Era, ISBN 1-870451-07-4, 615pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.)

Jackson, Shirley. **The Lottery: Adventures of the Daemon Lover.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-75-1, 222pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1949.) *18th August.*

James, John. **Men Went to Cattraeth.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17360-X, 240pp, paperback, £2.99. (Historical novel, here presented as "mythological fantasy," first published in 1969.) *15th July.*

Javna, John. **The Best of Science Fiction TV: The Critics' Choice from Captain Video to Star Trek, from The Jetsons to Robotech.** Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-074-X, 144pp, trade paperback, £5.95. (Illustrated media criticism, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Jeter, K. W. **Infernal Devices: A Mad Victorian Fantasy.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07345-0, 283pp, paperback, £2.95. ("Steampunk" sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *21st July.*

Kadrey, Richard. **Metrophage (A Romance of the Future).** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04291-5, 240pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988, as the last of Terry Carr's "Ace Specials".) *21st July.*

Kay, Guy Gavriel. **The Darkest Road – The Fionavar Tapestry: Book Three.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-823360-9, 420pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in Canada, 1986.) *30th June.*

Kellogg, Marjorie Bradley, with William B. Rossow. **The Wave and the Flame.** "Book One of Lear's Daughters." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04277-X, 358pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *16th June.*

Kerr, Katherine. **Daggerspell.** "Volume One of a compelling fantasy saga" (but no series title given). Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07315-9, 528pp, paperback, £3.95. (Celtic fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *7th July.*

Lafferty, R. A. **East of Laughter.** Morrigan, ISBN 1-870338-30-8, 176pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Fantasy novel, first world edition; there is also a simultaneously-published signed, limited "special edition," with an additional story by the author and an afterword by Gene Wolfe, priced at £35.)

Lee, Tanith. **The Book of the Beast – The Secret Book of Paradys II.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440152-3, 196pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition.) *30th June.*

Lee, Tanith. **The Book of the Damned – The Secret Book of Paradys I.** ISBN 0-04-440151-5, 229pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition.) *30th June.*

Lee, Tanith. **Night's Sorceries: A Novel of the Flat Earth.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-958470-0, 287pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel/collection [subtitle on half-title page is Stories from the Time of Azhriaz], first published in the USA, 1987.) *18th August.*

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope II: Wamphyri!** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20000-2, 495pp, paperback, £3.50. (Supernatural horror novel, first edition.) *23rd June.*

McCammon, Robert R. **Swan Song.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0040-7, 956pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *21st July.*

McLoughlin, John. **Toolmaker Koan.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-3977-0, 344pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *11th August.*

Mann, Phillip. **The Eye of the Queen.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-05890-7, 264pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1982.) *23rd June.*

Mann, Phillip. **Pioneers.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04281-8, 320pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) *21st July.*

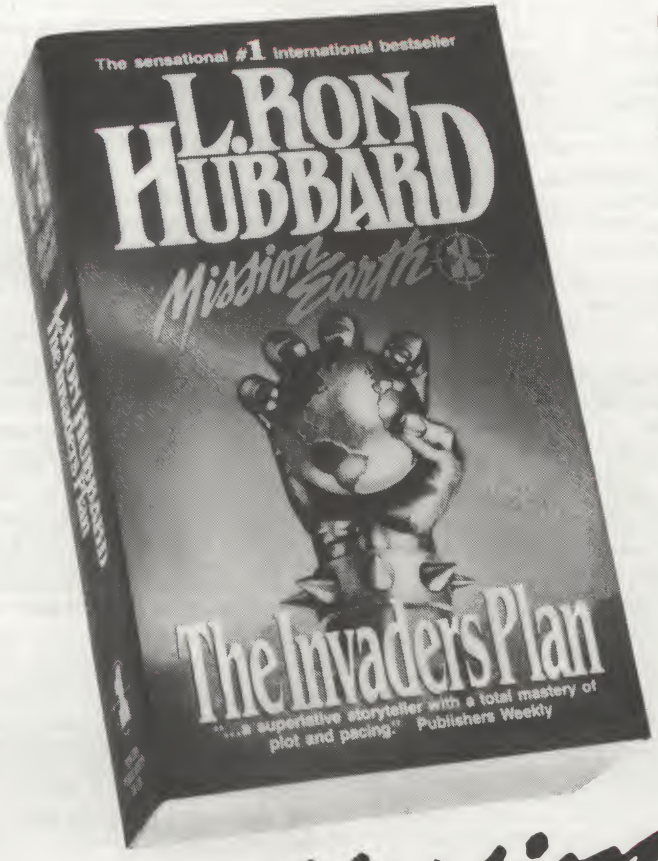
Mann, Phillip. **Master of Paxwax: Book One of the Story of Pawl Paxwax, the Gardener.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20039-8, 381pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1986.) *23rd June.*

Moorcock, Michael. **Mother London: A Novel.** Secker & Warburg, ISBN 0-436-28461-8, 496pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Non-sf novel, first edition.) *20th June.*

Morrow, James. **This is the Way the World Ends.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-956750-4, 319pp, trade paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.)

Murphy, Pat. **The Shadow Hunter.** Head-

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line, ISBN 0-7472-3141-9, 223pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1982; first UK edition of this Nebula Award-winning writer's debut novel.) *18th August.*

Niven, Larry. **The Smoke Ring.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8267-6, 362pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *11th August.*

Reaves, Michael. **The Burning Realm.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8263-3, 278pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988).

Roberts, Keith. **Pavane.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-010564-6, 237pp, paperback, £3.95. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1968.)

Saberhagen, Fred. **The First Book of Lost Swords: Woundhealer's Story.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8276-5, 281pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *11th August.*

Salvatore, R. A. **The Crystal Shard.** "A Forgotten Realms novel. From the publishers of the Dragonlance Saga." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011137-9, 333pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) *4th August.*

Scott, Melissa. **Five-Twelfths of Heaven.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04287-7, 339pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) *16th June.*

Silverberg, Robert. **At Winter's End.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04273-7, 404pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) *23rd June.*

Silverberg, Robert. **Star of Gypsies.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8275-7, 400pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *11th August.*

Silverberg, Robert, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Fantasy All-Time Greats.** Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-71-9, 431pp, paperback, £4.95. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA as *The Fantasy Hall of Fame*, 1983.)

Smith, Cordwainer. **The Rediscovery of Man.** "VGSF Classics 25." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04165-X, 377pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA as *The Best of Cordwainer Smith*, 1975.) *16th June.*

Smith, L. Neil. **The Crystal Empire.** Grafton, 0-586-20043-6, 511pp, paperback, £3.95. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *9th June.*

Springer, Nancy. **Chains of Gold.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8257-9, 230pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.)

Springer, Nancy. **Sea King Trilogy 1: Madbond.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8263-3, 214pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. **Brian Wilson Aldiss: A Working Bibliography.** Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-00-9, 80pp, paperbound, £3. (Bibliography, first edition; apparently published in 1987 but not received until July 1988.)

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Jack Vance: A Working Bibliography.** Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-02-5, 46pp, paperbound, £2. (Bibliography, first edition.)

Stewart, R. J., ed. **The Book of Merlin: Insights from the First Merlin Conference, London, June 1986.** Cassell/Blandford, ISBN 0-7137-2078-6, 192pp, trade paperback, £5.95. (Collection of essays, poems, etc., first published in 1987.) *7th July.*

Stewart, R. J., ed. **Merlin and Woman: The Second Merlin Conference London, June 1987.** Cassell/Blandford, ISBN 0-7137-2015-8, 190pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Collection of essays and stories, first edition.) *7th July.*

Straub, Peter. **Koko.** Viking, ISBN 0-670-801313, 564pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988; proof copy received.) *27th October.*

Tarr, Judith. **The Hall of the Mountain King: Volume One in the Avaryan Rising Trilogy.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30319-8, 278pp, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *5th August.*

Taylor, Roger. **The Call of the Sword: The First Chronicle of Hawklan.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3117-6, 280pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *18th August.*

Tepper, Sheri S. **Dervish Daughter.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13190-3, 221pp, paperback, £2.75. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *15th July.*

Thorpe, Dave. **Doc Chaos: The Chernobyl Effect.** Illustrated by Simon Bisley, Brian Bolland, Brett Ewins, Duncan Fegredo and others. Hooligan Press, ISBN 1-869802-08-X, 88pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novella from a comics writer; "a searing satire on science, love and the nuclear industry.") *21st July.*

Tigges, John. **As Evil Does.** W. H. Allen/Star, ISBN 0-352-32238-1, 254pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *21st July.*

Tiptree, James, Jr. **The Starry Rift.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0089-X, 250pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) *18th August.*

Turtledove, Harry. **The Legion of Videssos – Book Three of The Videssos Cycle.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-958900-1, 413pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *21st July.*

Tuttle, Lisa. **Heroines: Women Inspired by Women.** Harrap, ISBN 0-245-54604-9, 216pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Collection of profile/interviews with famous or successful women, by a well-known sf and fantasy writer; first edition.) *30th June.*

Vance, Jack. **The Face: Volume Four of the Demon Princes Series.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07310-8, 271pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) *21st July.*

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. **With a Single Spell.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20009-6, 304pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *4th August.*

Watson, Ian. **The Fire Worm.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04300-8, 207pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Sf/horror novel, first edition – expanded from the story "Jingling Geordie's Hole," *Interzone* 17, 1986.) *23rd June.*

Watson, Ian. **Whores of Babylon.** Paladin, ISBN 0-586-08773-7, 302pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) *7th July.*

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman, eds. **Dragonlance Tales, Vol. 3: Love and War.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-010696-0, 365pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1987.) *17th July.*

Wells, Angus. **The First Book of the Kingdoms: Wrath of Ashar.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7221-9026-3, 360pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel; apparently there is also a hardcover from Michael Joseph [not seen].) *18th August.*

Willis, Connie. **Lincoln's Dreams.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20015-0, 256pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *4th August.*

Zelazny, Roger. **Sign of Chaos.** "The classic Amber series continues." Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0097-0, 214pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *21st July.*

# Interaction

*In lieu of our normal readers' letters column, we have extracted most of the following comments from the questionnaires which were returned by many of our subscribers in June-July 1988. We asked readers what they thought of our stories, artwork and non-fiction, and what suggestions they might have for improvements in the magazine – The Editors.*

## THE SEX DEPARTMENT

"Uncomfortably many of its stories are far overloaded in the sex department. Often not very nicely. The last issue, number 24, three out of six stories. Disgusting" – Alexander Brick.

"Standard is about as high as I think you can get. Love it as it is!" – Joanne C. Raine.

"Why not try thematic issues now and again? E.g.: European material (if you ever get any); sex; money; art; sex again; technology; music..." – Roger Thomas.

"'Memories of the Body' by Lisa Tuttle was obnoxious whingeing porn. Apparently sex and violence are OK if labelled 'feminist'...I wish you'd bring back Mary Gentle's book reviews: John Clute sometimes gets a bit near Pseud's Corner. Charles Platt is tiresome – deliberately so, I think" – Dr Elizabeth Robinson.

"Issue 24 was excellent. 'Heartland's acidic tones were astonishing. I hope you feature more of Karen Fowler's work in future issues. Julio Abrera's 'Salvage' was pretty good too. He succeeded in painting the dark, claustrophobic tones which the subject merited" – D.A. Jacovelli.

## PLATT'S BLOODY CHEEK

"Well, well, dear old Charles Platt is a little joker, isn't he? But still fun to read" – David Redd.

"Who does Charles Platt think he is?" – Stephen Robson.

"Charles Platt's column is the best thing in *IZ*" – Ian Barker.

"Film/book reviews wonderful in every way. Keep them! C. Platt does talk crap, though: I enjoyed his piece a lot. Bloody cheek, coming over here, etc., etc." – S.T. Parkin.

"One interesting interview (such as K.W. Jeter) is worth rather more to me than pages of waffle by Charles Platt" – Kevin Clay.

"I find most of the interviews tedious to read. Increase story content" – K.D.G. Cates.

"Charles Platt – good stuff" – D.C. Mills.

## A KNIGHTHOOD FOR NICK

"Charles Platt column – very good. But get somebody else to review the films!!" – Paul D. Glover.

"Don't let Nick Lowe away from his typewriter (bring the films to him). Who needs the films when you can read his column?" – Stephen Wake.

"When does Nick Lowe get his knighthood??" – Matt Quartermain.

"Both book and film reviews work well – please don't change them" – John Terry.

"I am really *not* interested in book reviews – there are plenty elsewhere. Nick Lowe's film reviews are excellent" – Keith Mitchell.

## BIG BRITS

"Keep the price down! Interviews with *big Brit* writers – Shaw, Aldiss, Clarke, Watson, Bayley, Adams" – Mike Lowndes.

"Kim Newman's 'Famous Monsters' was one of the best shorts I've read all year" – Terry Pratchett.

"More 'News,' no comics, more British authors. Stories by Moorcock, Ballard, Stableford and Josephine Saxton" – Mark Baumgart.

"Concentrate less on 'straight' sf, more on unusual ones" – David Cooper.

"Be a bit riskier in your choice of stories. After all, this is the postmodern era!" – Jeremy Crampton.

"The book reviews are too heavy. Publish more hard sf" – Andrew Lawn.

"I like to see less 'horror' in the stories – it's not needed to give a good story" – Sandra Jones.

"Keep growing. Spring the occasional surprise" – R.P. Savage.

## ORNATE CLUTE

"The interviews are fascinating – keep it up. I find the book reviews generally good, but I often feel Mr Clute is a little incomprehensible. Maybe when I get my degree the mists will clear?!" – Sarah Oswald.

"Nick Lowe's and John Clute's columns are especially ace. I turn to these first, invariably. Ignore the fools who complain at the amount of non-fiction" – Michael Sandy.

"John Clute's ornate and pretentious style of writing mars an otherwise excellent book review section" – S.J. Wood.

"Don't make any radical changes. I've seen too many good things fall apart when someone tries to fix what isn't broken. I like the friendly tone and sincerity of the editors and reviewers; don't lose it as you grow" – David L. Smelley.

"Ballard interview good. Book reviews excellent. 'Comment on Britain' very good" – John Hudson.

## REALLY USEFUL SUGGESTIONS

"Put in cutouts to glue into figures. Pop-up pages. Scratch and sniff. Bread painting. Sports pages. Irritating alterations to the magazine paper size so it won't stack properly" – Alexander S. Brick.

"Change the cover, remove the book review columns. Do not go monthly. Remove interior illustrations (except SMS). Sack Platt" – Stephen Zatman.

"Abandon the mud-slinging between book-review columnists and letter writers: Stuart Falconer and Lee Montgomerie, issue 22; Martin Smith and John Clute, a saga sprawling over issues 23 and 24. Let them do it in private with the curtains decently drawn" – P.F. Hamilton.

"Include more 'News'. Colour illustrations" – K.I. Morris.

## MORE NON-FICTION

"Editorials could be expanded. US magazines often have quite good dissertations, essays, etc., on various subjects – that would be good for *IZ*" – B.P. Jeapes.

"It's fine both in content and balance. Reviews and news sections are essential. Interviews with authors most enjoyable and informative. Suggest occasional special features on authors and their works/themes/obsessions" – Ann-Marie London.

"Keep doing what you're doing and get some interviews with some of the big names in sf/fantasy. Also, how about some reviews of older books, along the lines of David Pringle's *100 Best*... book" – Dean H. Bass.

"Scrap the film reviews. Out of date by the time they are printed. Make it a monthly!" – C. Wong.

"Please keep reviews going. They are a very important guideline for buying sf when the major newspapers rarely review it, particularly paperbacks" – J.M.E. Bishop.

"If you wish to expand the non-fiction section even further, how about the odd article on some aspect of sf, e.g. its history, themes, authors or significance?" – Ms K.P. Misra.

"Printing more letters from readers would be an improvement" – M.J. Rees.

"Don't lose your nerve, and don't lose sight of the fact that *Interzone* is a magazine of *fiction*" – Stuart Falconer.

## HEART AS BIG AS THE UNIVERSE

"The themes of too many *IZ* stories tends towards the earthbound near future. Sf should be a medium without imaginative horizons. Please give us more outward-looking sf (not merely dimensionally – in spirit also), along with greater style and a sense of adventurous wonder. Sf with a heart as big as the universe" – John B. Hodgson.

"The magazine is too depressing at the moment: more 'mankind can conquer all' stories" – Andrew Strachan.

"Personally, I would prefer more 'hard' sf, but you have to cater for a wide range of tastes and I think you do this very well" – John Quinlan.

"Keep up the varied stories. The variety of stories is what I find most appealing about your magazine – Doug Valentine.

## ALE-SWIGGING CRAFTSMEN

"*IZ*'s downbeat stories are not the stifled maunderings of crotchety, quivering aesthetes, but strong-stomached tales of terror, warning and advice flowing free from the pens of hearty, witty, ale-swigging craftsmen" – Simon Ings.

"Keep publishing the occasional 'fringe' and 'controversial' stories: the day I pick up a new issue knowing exactly what sort of thing to expect (however high the standard) is the day *IZ* starts to die: keep us guessing, and you keep us interested" – Wendy A. Glover.

"Nice to see the unreadable 'literary' stories by big-name writers have disappeared! I think after a bad patch *IZ* is definitely on the right track" – B.J. Cox.

"Brin's 'The Giving Plague' and Stableford's 'The Growth of the House of Usher': so far both of these top my list for best-of-the-year fiction out of any magazine. I am American, and it has been really helpful to hear your opinions and reviews. You have had terrific fiction. Absolutely great. In *Locus* I consistently rate you number one" – David L. Bailey.

"Just keep on going – I'm more and more impressed (really!). But leave me someone to 'discover'..." – David S. Garnett.

## DREADFUL CYBERPUNKS

"Whatever your feelings about cyberpunk as such, Charles Stross and Eric Brown (*especially* Brown) are really fairly dreadful even as cyberpunks go" – N. Tringham.

"Keep a good mix of long and short, sf and fantasy/horror; keep buying stories by Eric Brown!" – Keith Brooke.

"More Eric Brown, David Brin" – Paul Zepler.

"More stories by Greg Egan. More stories by Angela Carter. More by John Crowley (if possible). More strips from SMS. More stories by Phillip Mann. More stories by Alex Stewart. More from Charles Stross. More from Brian Stableford" – Philip J. Backers.

"I'd like to say how much I enjoyed Christopher Evans's story 'Artefacts.' He's a writer you don't hear much from, which is a pity as he's so good" – Eric Brown.

"Keep telling the truth! Jeter's interview was sad. How come he didn't get to talk about his own work?" – Bruce Sterling.

"Go on searching for relevant sf. You haven't found it yet. But there's hope..." – H.N. Crawshaw.

## FANZINE ART?

"Get some decent artists in. *Interzone* looks more and more like a fanzine because of the sheer amateurness of the illustrations" – Phil Stephenson-Payne.

"I'd like to say how good generally I think the illustrations are. They always add to the stories, and never distract attention from the prose. I love Nick Lowe's film reviews. Likewise the book reviews. Charles Platt's so-called 'Comment on Britain' was a sorry little article" – Susan Beetlestone.

"The general layout and look of *IZ* is of a very high standard. The stories and artwork are unequalled elsewhere and *IZ* plays a vital role in British sf. It would be great to see wider distribution – in newsagents and bookshops. I believe an A5 *Granta*-style format (with same interior as at present) would assist towards this goal" – Michael Robb.

"The covers of *Interzone*, although colourful and technically well executed, tend to be rather clichéd and forgettable. How about something a bit more surreal and innovative... Overall, I would rather that the magazine verged more towards the experimental and was in danger of displeasing readers" – June Laverick.

## BADLY-DRAWN CRAP

"'The Good Robot' (SMS): obviously *IZ*'s editorial control was out that day – I've never seen such badly-drawn crap masquerading as art in my life!" – Michael Robb.

"I'd like a regular comic strip (not SMS though: he's too overpowering for a regular strip, great for one-offs). The strip is an sf form which has had its ups and downs. Perhaps *IZ* could set a standard" – P.G. Robinson.

"I enjoyed the interviews with writers, especially K.W. Jeter and Thomas M. Disch. More SMS please. 'The Good Robot' was brilliant!" – Simon Maybury.

## WE BASK IN PRAISE

"Keep up the good work, and I look forward to a time when I pay £22 and get one every month!" – Lee Fox.

"In previous years there's always been more stories disliked than liked, but not this year – the best year so far!" – J.M. Johnson.

"You're doing a marvellous job. I think *Interzone* gets better and better" – Ellen Datlow.

"Excellent. Improve? You want to improve?" – Dave O'Reilly.

Continued from p.4

**Words International**, the revived *Words* magazine, seems to be in trouble once more. Having folded in early 1986, it resumed publication under its present title in late 1987 – but it has not produced a new issue since April this year (not up until our time of going to press, at any rate). For a supposed "literary monthly," this is bad news. Although it is not an sf magazine, *Words International*'s fourth issue, February 1988, contained an interview with **Brian Aldiss** and a story by **Ramsey Campbell**, and similar genre material has been promised for the future. I understand that editor/publisher Phillip Vine is seeking new financial backers.

## PEOPLE

*IZ*'s invaluable advisory editor and principal sf book critic, **John Clute**, has a book out from an American small press. *Strokes: Essays and Reviews 1966-86* is adorned with accolades from William Gibson: "Clute is *formidable*; an urban literary wit whose grasp of the genre, and its place in the wider world of letters, are very likely unequalled in our time and language"; and from Thomas M. Disch – "The most far-ranging, authoritative, and sheerly enjoyable body of critical writing in the field." *Strokes*, which is published by Serconia Press of Seattle in both hardcover ($16.95) and paperback ($8.95), may be ordered in Britain from Andy Richards, 136 New Rd., Bedfont, Feltham, Middlesex TW14 8HT. I recommend it.

**Maxim Jakubowski**, erstwhile publisher, anthologist, critic and sf writer (and longtime *Interzone* subscriber), has recently opened an interesting new bookshop in London. Murder One, as it's called, is Britain's first shop devoted entirely to crime and mystery fiction (among his many other activities, Jakubowski is editor of the "Blue Murder" series of hardboiled detective stories published in paperback by Simon & Schuster Ltd.) Murder One is to be found in Denmark Street, near Tottenham Court Road tube station, at the old premises of Forbidden Planet, the sf-and-comics specialist shop. **Forbidden Planet** itself has moved around the corner, into an impressively-furnished "superstore" at 71 New Oxford Street – which must say something for the current health of sf retailing.

## THREE BALLARD BOOKS

With his last year's novel, *The Day of Creation*, now out in paperback from Grafton Books, there are three more J.G. Ballard titles due – although none of them is actually a new full-length work. **Memories of the Space Age**, his illustrated collection of "space stories," has already been mentioned in these pages. It's out from Arkham House in the USA about now. The evocative title story was first published in *Interzone* 2, Summer 1982, and is hitherto uncollected. **Running Wild**, out this month in Britain as a Hutchinson Novella, is a brand new non-sf story of about 25,000 words. Its narrator is the police psychiatrist Dr Richard Greville, who first appeared in "The Object of the Attack" (*Interzone* 9, Autumn 1984), and the new tale involves his investigation of a mysterious and shocking Thames Valley massacre. "Maybe Richard Greville will become my Maigret," JGB remarks. The third projected book is a new, enlarged and illustrated, edition of Ballard's classic **The Atrocity Exhibition** (1970). This is being put together by the publishers of *Re/Search*, who produced a fine 180-page volume by and about JGB some four years ago (those who are still interested in purchasing a copy of that last item should write to Re/Search Publications, 20 Romolo #B, San Francisco, CA 94133, USA).

## OTHER PUBLISHING NEWS

A new humorous sf novel by **John Sladek**, called *Bugs*, is due to be published in Britain by Macmillan in the spring of 1989. The editor is James Hale, who also oversees the very funny fantasy novels of **Tom Holt** (*Expecting Someone Taller*, 1987, and *Who's Afraid of Beowulf?*, 1988).

Deborah Beale, the editor of the rapidly-expanding sf list at Century Hutchinson (Arrow/Legend), has bought the UK rights to **Howard Waldrop**'s books, including the Ace Special novel *Them Bones* and the horribly-titled (but critically praised) collection *Howard Who?* It's high time that Waldrop, a legend of the Texas sf scene, was introduced to British readers.

Macdonald/Futura, publishers of Orbit paperbacks and many hardcover sf novels, has been losing staff at an alarming rate. Editor Toby Roxborough (a larger than life character if ever there was one) left some time ago to tend a farm in the Hebrides, and now his esteemed boss, **Richard Evans**, has also quit the company. Evans is taking charge of the sf and fantasy line at Headline Book Publishing, on a part-time basis. However, all is not lost at Futura: longtime sf fan John Jarrold is selecting titles there.

Unwin/Hyman's sf/fantasy editor, Jane Johnson, is well pleased with the high paperback sales of *The Darkest Road*, part three of **Guy Gavriel Kay**'s distinguished fantasy trilogy "The Fionavar Tapestry." Among other books she is publishing this season are *Other Edens 2*, an anthology of new work edited by Christopher Evans and Robert Holdstock, and *The Secret Life of Houses*, **Scott Bradfield**'s first collection (three of the stories originally appeared in *Interzone*).

An extract from **Paul Preuss**'s near-future thriller *Starfire* appeared in the last issue of this magazine. The novel will be paperbacked by Sphere Books, according to editor Martin Fletcher. The hardcover edition is out this month from Simon & Schuster, the publishing house which recently issued *Interzone: The 3rd Anthology* (and which, we are delighted to say, has contracted for *Interzone: The 4th Anthology* in 1989).

**(David Pringle)**

# COMING NEXT ISSUE

In the third bimonthly *Interzone*: an intriguing story from a new British writer, "Driving Through Korea" by Ian Lee. Plus new fiction by Barrington Bayley, John Brosnan, Kim Stanley Robinson, Bob Shaw and others. Also: an article by J.G. Ballard, an author interview, the Charles Platt column and our usual features.


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THE MOUNTAINS OF CHANNADRAN
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A tale of mystery, horror and magic set in long-ago China.
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DAVID PRINGLE
FOREWORD BY BRIAN ALDISS

David Pringle, author of the highly praised *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* and *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters*, has written a much-needed, lively and authoritative guide to the top 100 English-language fantasy novels published since 1945. *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels* is a book which will stimulate new interest in these modern masterpieces as well as appealing to all dedicated fans of the fantastic in literature.

The selection is a wide one, embracing stories of supernatural horror, heroic fantasy or 'fabulation' – all of them dealing with the marvellous, the magical or the otherworldly. The titles are discussed in chronological order of publication, and range from *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake, *Seven Days in New Crete* by Robert Graves, *Conan the Conqueror* by Robert E. Howard, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Dandelion Wine* By Ray Bradbury, *The Once and Future King* by T. H. White – to (more recently) *Cold Heaven* by Brian Moore, *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter, *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Updike, and *The Day of Creation* by J. G. Ballard.

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